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EDMONSTON & DOUGLAS, EDINBURGH.

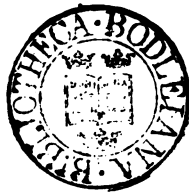
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CAMBRIDGE . . . MACMILLAN AND CO.

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BLINDPITS



VOL. I.

EDINBURGH
EDMONSTON AND DOUGLAS
1868

250. w. 96.



CHAPTER I.

WE speak of people who "have seen better days," and to ears lying in wait the phrase has a certain respect and sympathy in it. To have been born and bred among the affluent or comfortable classes, and in time, after much tribulation, to settle down into indigence from which there seems no refuge but the grave, is a lot somewhat of the saddest. This lot had overtaken Mrs. David Barclay, and she had not met it with the soul of a heroine; on the contrary, she had succumbed.

In these her days of indigence she had to climb two pairs of stairs to get to her abode, and as two families entered their houses from each landing, it will be seen that misfortune had not at least sent her to a desert place. A desert place—no; it was a large, wealthy, flourishing city, with a rush and roar of life in all its streets. In this lofty habitation Mrs.

David Barclay lived, and moaned, and bestowed her confidence on her neighbours as she had opportunity, who were no unwilling listeners to the details of her former grandeur. Mrs. Barclay had wealthy relatives with whom she had absolutely no intercourse, but whom you may be sure she did not forget. She told Mrs. Dods—her nearest and most intimate neighbour—of her relation Mr. Grant, a gentleman who had the entire management of the great Heatherdale estates, who kept his carriage and visited with all the county families; and of her cousin Miss Boston, whose fortune she expected to inherit—“somewhere about £20,000; it might be not an extraordinary sum, but very respectable.” Uncommonly respectable, Mrs. Dods thought, at the same time that she took the liberty of giving Mrs. Barclay credit for drawing the long bow.

Though thus continually held in honourable remembrance in Mrs. Barclay’s circle, you will not be surprised to be told that these distinguished personages never by any chance mentioned Mrs. Barclay in their circles; no doubt she lurked in their memories—there is proof that she did—but she was not

ever on their tongues. As there are reasons for most things, reasons were not wanting for this. For a long time they had heard only evil, and that continually, of Mrs. Barclay and her family. First, Mr. Barclay died miserably insolvent, after having tried the wretched shift of living extravagantly to prop his falling fortunes; then his sons—three of them—as they grew to manhood, bored their well-to-do relatives for assistance of all kinds, till the grave closed over them, not leaving a very creditable swell on the sea of life behind them; then, till her daughter discovered the one-sided correspondence and put a stop to it, Mrs. Barclay herself despatched many begging-letters—for they could be called nothing else, whatever she might think. A course of this kind wears out poor—that is rich—human nature. Mr. Grant's wife, who had been Mrs. Barclay's cousin, was dead, and very likely he had poor relations of his own;—if he had not, he was lucky beyond most of the sons of Adam; and for Miss Boston, she was not to be judged by ordinary rules,—so when Mrs. Barclay ceased to jog the memories of her relatives, they slept so far as she was concerned.

Mrs. Barclay had not been a wise good mother ; in her youth she had been silly, and selfish, and vain ; and in her age she was silly, and selfish, and querulous. Hers was not an old age pleasant to look upon, and it must have been painfully unpleasant to live beside.

It is part of the compensation for their lot, I daresay, that weak needy people often buoy themselves up by the expectation of some all but impossible windfall ; thus, Mrs. Barclay constantly reckoned upon one day enjoying Miss Boston's money,—not that she wished her death, she only counted on it. Nor did it serve any end for her daughter Barbara to remind her that Miss Boston could leave her money to whom she liked, and that it was in the last degree improbable that she would leave it to them. “ Improbable ! ” said Mrs. Barclay ; “ who else could she leave it to ? but you'll be right, Barbara, and I'll be wrong, or it will be a wonder.” It was part of Mrs. Barclay's miserable case that her daughter did not pay sufficient deference to her opinions, and she was ingenious in twisting things to make it appear so. Miss Boston's money !—rather

than hear of Miss Boston's death Barbara would have wanted her money for ever. She had not seen her for many years, and without a special invitation—which she did not expect—she would not go to see her; but she felt that this world would be a darker, colder place to her if she knew Miss Boston was out of it. In her early halcyon days Barbara had often been the guest of Miss Boston for weeks together. Then came estrangement and her battle with the world. She was young then, and very likely had in her possession a copy-book, in which was written in round text the statement that "Adversity is the touchstone of friendship," and she imagined she proved the truth of the aphorism in her mother's quarrel with the Grants and Miss Boston; she was not fully aware of the grounds of it, but believed it to have been occasioned by reflections on her father, and she espoused it warmly, all the more warmly, perhaps, that she loved Miss Boston and felt her desertion keenly. In after years, when she was better able to judge of matters, she exonerated Miss Boston, and would have gladly sought her friendship, had Miss Boston ever recognised her existence; but she never

did that, and Barbara would not thrust herself upon her in the character of a poor relation : she had a share of pride—proper pride she called it. If there be such a thing, it is a most expensive luxury ; a poor relation might as well drive a carriage and pair as keep it up ; but it is a luxury.

Barbara was better fitted for her changed circumstances than most young ladies of her age would have been. She was passably educated ; she was neither romantic, nor imaginative, nor intellectual ; she had read very few novels, and those she had read had been read as a duty, and she had been glad when they were done ; of poets she preferred Crabbe ; she liked facts and definite information ; her penmanship was good, as all her handiwork was ; and she had a tender womanly heart, and a special love for children and animals ; and finally, and most to the point, she believed in herself—in her own ability to dare and do.

In person she was under the middle size, inclining to be dumpy. She had a rather low forehead, a straight nose with finely-cut nostrils, a pretty mouth not expressive, dark eyes, dark hair, and dark complexion ; but

you were not so much impressed with the idea that she was good-looking as that she was judicious-looking. Her dress, her manner, her aspect, might all be described as judicious. When she came to face that tough problem, What shall middle-class penniless ladies do? she had no difficulty in fixing her vocation; there was even less choice then than now. Not being an original genius, it never occurred to her that she could be a medical woman; her mind was essentially commonplace, and she adopted teaching as her calling. I don't think she would ever lead her pupils to the higher slopes of Parnassus, but she was thoroughly capable of teaching them the use of the hammer, the chisel, the alpenstock, which would enable them to climb that height if it were in them to do it—and how many teachers do more?

CHAPTER II.

MISS BOSTON was a single lady, and ugly, or, to put it more euphemistically—plain-looking. She had a very long razor-like face, with a long snub-nose lying down the middle of it; her hair was sandy in colour, her eyes light grey, her chin sharp and projecting, her mouth small and round—it might have been pretty in another situation, but inserted like an eyelet-hole below the big rugged nose it looked simply ridiculous. Add to this a sallow complexion, in which the ravages of small-pox were distinctly visible, and you will comprehend that Miss Boston could not be described as eye-sweet. She was tall, slight, and elegantly made in person, so that strangers walking behind her turned round in passing to look in her face; it was enough—no one looked twice, and Miss Boston knew it. The Bostons were a high-tempered race—impulsive and passionate. Although the only child of parents

wealthy according to their station, Miss Boston in the days of her youth had much to endure. Her mother was a feeble little woman, who neither dared peep nor mutter ; her father was a gentleman subject to chronic irritation of temper, varied by occasional thunderstorms of rage, during which he would think nothing of making a book, or a stool, or any other handy missile, fly at the head of his wife or daughter : he generally confined these very strong measures of authority to them, as he found when he included his servants in such discipline they were apt to take him into court and make a bother. But he had his moments of relenting, when it did occur to him that, after all, his only child might not be so much to blame in the matter of her sex, and that if she had had her choice she would probably have chosen a beautiful face rather than an ugly one ; on both of these points he did not hesitate to twit her when he found it a relief to his feelings to do so.

Miss Boston had good common sense, a manageable slice of her father's temper, a warm and even romantic heart. It will not be surprising then, that, situated as she was at home, it occurred to her that there was a

admirers :—men who could overlook ugliness and the chance of a tropical hurricane shaking their roof-tree, in consideration of the solid advantages the alliance would give. Miss Boston, of course, had the right of veto, and exercised it with some energy oftener than once ; but she also took to herself the right of choice, and on whom should her choice fall but on a quiet, decent, timid sort of man, who occupied no higher position than steward—grieve, as he was called—on a farm in the neighbourhood. Him Miss Boston selected as the man she delighted to honour. To ordinary eyes he had no earthly quality raising him a quarter of an inch above thousands of decent men to be met with any day through the length and breadth of the land ; to Miss Boston's eyes, I verily believe, he wore a glory round his head. It seems laughable. John Simson—the hero—had, I grieve to say, been in the habit of characterising Miss Boston to his fellow-servants as “an ill-faured randy woman ;” but he

was a Scotchman, and had a Scotchman's yearning for an earthly possession, a lairdship ; Laird Simson—it would sound well ; the Laird o' Blindpits,—for so Mr. Boston's little property was called ; he was dazzled, and finally arranged an elopement with the heiress.

Miss Boston was in her twenty-fourth year and of a strong mind, but she was in love ; it was the first time she had taken the disease, and as in fever, the circumstances, which in ordinary illness would have been in her favour, told powerfully against her. Fever runs a desperate course in a strong human frame, and I apprehend love does the same in a strong-minded subject.

As no one knew of Miss Boston's purpose, no one remonstrated ; remonstrance, however, would no doubt have been vain, but Providence was kind to her, as I think. She wrote a business-like letter to her father, telling him in few words what she was about to do, placed it under the glass on her table that it might not be discovered too soon, and in the grey of the evening quietly left the house. Whether she thought of the feeble mother she was leaving behind I know not ; there are times when a great



horror of selfishness seizes people. She left the house, and walked rapidly to the trysting-place—an old thorn-tree by the side of a footpath at the corner of a field—*the man was not there!* She went back homewards, found her letter where she had left it untouched, and locked it in her desk to save herself the trouble of writing another; for she deemed that the occasion for it was only adjourned by some unlucky hitch. Next day, however, she heard that Simson was *non inventus*; at the last moment his heart had failed him, and, in modern phrase, he had skedaddled to avoid the greatness that was to be thrust upon him; or, perchance, he recalled a pair of eyes like sloes, and cheeks like a pulpit cushion, that were his ideal of feminine charms. He fled, and Miss Boston saw him no more. He fled, and both were no doubt saved a life of extra wretchedness.

From a frightful storm, all the more terrible that it was mute and raged internally, Miss Boston emerged not conspicuously changed. Not soured, or hardened, or mollified; she did not go distraught or fall into bad health. A loving eye watching her might have detected a difference; but no such eye watched

her. The death of her feeble ailing mother was the first wave that spent its force in partly obliterating her outraged feelings. Her father survived several years, and then she was left sole heiress, and took up at once the rôle of eccentric elderly lady, went about in thick boots and broad-brimmed straw hat, and farmed her own land vigorously. She was good and generous by fits and starts, and gave way to occasional outbursts of temper. One or two poor ladies in the neighbourhood who visited her had no need to feel surprised at a thorough snubbing, and probably they were not, for they took it meekly. Miss Boston never related the story of her grand mistake to any human being. Not when the very few friends of her youth visited her, and the hand-to-hand talk over the fire waxed confidential, and they laid bare their private histories to her—not at such an unguarded moment had she ever been betrayed into the weakness of making such a revelation. She was ashamed of it—not of her love, but of the object of it. When she had come to herself, she was unutterably thankful that she was there unshackled by such a wretched tie. But still it had been a mistake that could not be rectified.

That had gone out of her nature which could not be replaced or recalled. If she could have gossiped over it there might have been hope, as a copious perspiration throws off a cold. Many women, and men too, have been disappointed in this form; but they could love again, or almost as often as you like, with their kind of love—Miss Boston could not. If it had so been that she had chosen worthily and made a happy marriage, her love would have flowed on like a mighty river, beautifying all its borders; as it was, it had been absorbed in the sand and was lost. Why this waste? Ay, why indeed?

When a woman is fairly over the bar that crosses the entrance of life—over it, whether well or ill—the years glide quickly by; and time did not stand still for Miss Boston. She farmed, and farmed well; and she read newspapers, and history, and her Bible. She was not one of those ladies who can read nothing that has not a thread of story in it, and can read anything that has. She could not make personal comfort an object in life; she was past middle age before she even put her back to a chair or her foot on a stool, and to the end of her days she never lay down on a sofa.



She had been often mildly advised to alter her house, and refurnish it to suit the progress of the times, but she scouted the idea. Why, every petty tradesman that made a few pounds must have a fine house, and a lot of showy rickety furniture in it. No; there was more need of an example the other way. The outer crust of eccentricity grew and hardened with years, but her nature softened, as everything good at the core does; time will sour small beer, but it mellows a generous vintage. And so, whether she was aware of it or not, Miss Boston figured for many years as a character in the place, and then died, to be the occasion of my relating this story.

CHAPTER III.

It is a trying thing for a woman to be always with children, without having the divine right of mother in them. It is not to be wondered at that, in the lapse of years, women so circumstanced should develop into individuals fitted to remind you that life is a grind; it is the natural course of things, and Miss Barclay did not altogether escape it. She had a very strict eye to the proprieties; she exacted all her dues, and she clad commonplace ideas in a roundabout style, and grammar irritatingly correct; but she had a genial heart and a sunny temperament, which counterbalanced these small vices that leaned to virtue's side. When I think of her laborious self-denying life, and the brave spirit that carried her through it, I am ashamed to have hinted at these blemishes.

To work hard all day, to return wearied in the

evening, and exert herself to cheer her mother ; with a soul which naturally devised liberal things, to be compelled to plan farthing savings, and to have a sickening anxiety, every time the postman knocked, as to what news from her absent brothers—had for years been the routine of her life, varied occasionally by coming to some desperate strait that seemed impassable, only that time never stops, and must needs carry on the wretched as well as other people. Then death stepped in, and anxiety was lost in grief ; but one of her brothers left her a legacy that sweetened life to her—his only child Bessie Barclay, whose mother was also dead. Aunt Barbara took the orphan home, and it never once occurred to her that in doing so she was adding to her burdens.

Her brother left her yet another legacy which did not sweeten her life,—which embittered it for years, and taxed her energies more ways than one, and which finally told terribly against her when in a position the last in which she could have expected to find herself. She had become surety for a debt of £300 incurred by him. Was this honest ? How, out of the best salary she could expect in her profession, was she to

her brother's error—error she called it, and excused him for it to herself on various grounds. He had asked her to be security for a loan of £30; she hesitated, but consented; and he put a cypher to the 30, and dying, left nothing behind him but his daughter and debt, for £300 of which she found herself responsible. Her creditor, aware of her circumstances, had generously foregone his interest; he was a man of means, and in effect it would have mattered little to him to have lost such a sum, but he regularly gave Miss Barclay a receipt for the few pounds with which for years she nibbled at the great body of her debt. Whether the possibility of frankly forgiving it ever occurred to him is hard to say; but he never did so, and Miss Barclay never for an instant imagined he could. She had read few novels, and very few generous spirits had crossed her path; justice was all she expected, and here, to her surprise and gratitude, she was getting more than justice.

Miss Barclay did not marry ; I can easily imagine why. Certainly not because she had been, as the phrase is, disappointed in love ; that in her case was nearly impossible ; she was judicious in all her feelings and actions, and to suppose her acting the part Miss Boston did in her youth, would be simply outrageous. Not that she could not love ; she could love deeply and long, but she could not love quickly, and in her narrow sphere she had never met with any one who induced her to think long enough about him ; besides, had she not her household to provide for ? And of late she had added another member to her household, on the recommendation of Mrs. Leadbetter, the mother of her pupils. Miss Dobbie was an elderly lady, who from some disastrous circumstances found herself penniless ; her relatives had subscribed to buy her a small annuity, and were glad to see her under Mrs. Barclay's roof. Barbara had feared the experiment on her mother's account, but it answered marvellously. Miss Dobbie was an object on whom the elder lady could expend her talk with the certainty of sympathy and appreciation. She was singularly inoffensive ; if she had possessed a

thimbleful of robust common-sense she would have been an acquisition. She was a little woman, who had been half-a-century in this world, with amazingly small result apparently. She had been pretty, having neat features and a very bright complexion; the features were neat still, but the complexion—the white had grown tarnished, and the red had broken up into fine thready streaks. Her hair was thin, and would have been gray if left to the freedom of its own will, but she spent a good deal of her time in the retirement of her own room, sitting with her head covered with blotting-paper steeped in a decoction warranted to make red or gray hair a glossy black; the result in Miss Dobbie's case was a shade of purple, but she was pleased—she shrank from a front. Her hair notwithstanding, she had not apparently come to the knowledge that she was no longer young; there had been few milestones in her life, and crow-feet and gray hairs come on so very gradually—a beneficent arrangement, no doubt, meant to break the fact of decay to us as gently as possible; and having seen no sudden marked change in herself—there being no tall lad or slim maiden by her side—



she still dressed youthfully, and would place a flush of pink ribbons below her little withered chin in perfect good faith. And why not? It harmed no one, and every woman has not the grim good sense to surrender her colours, and walk knowingly into the gloomy tenement of old age.

You have the household: old lady Mrs. Barclay, elderly lady Miss Dobbie, elderly young lady Miss Barclay, young girl Bessie Barclay, young maid-of-all-work Katy. I daresay in every town and city there are many such households of stranded women, you would say; but if day and way can be met, don't fancy that they are at all dolorous. The great majority of women are blessed with the power of relieving their cares and sorrows as dogs perspire—not to be coarse—through the tongue.

Of an afternoon, while Bessie was conning the lessons which she was to say to her aunt in the evening, Mrs. Barclay would look from her side of the fireplace across to Miss Dobbie at the other, and ask "if she felt comfortable; for in a closet this size it is always too hot or too cold. Little did I think, at one time of my life, that I would ever live in a place

“ Or if I had not lost my money, Mrs. Barclay,” rejoined Miss Dobbie; “ but it’s a world of change. When I think of the time that I lived with Miss Davie—Miss Davie kept a most select boarding-school, and moved in the best society—the highest style of Christian gentlewoman she was. I was an orphan, with neither sister nor brother; and she was a mother to me. I stayed with her after my education was finished, and I might have married from her house; but she said, ‘ a happy marriage is an excellent thing, only, Jane Dobbie, don’t throw yourself away.’ She didn’t like cousin Frank; he is a married man now with a large family—Dobbie of Dobbiestanes. I mind one night dancing with him. I can see the gown I had on. I’ll let you see it,” and she went to her room and came back with a thing that looked like a very gay tail for a kite; but it was only some yards of ribbon with a bit of every gown she had ever had strung on it. She selected the gown in question, and

Mrs. Barclay looked at it with interest ; even Bessie left her books to see it.

“ I had a gown the very same as that,” exclaimed Mrs. Barclay ! “ I mind it so well ; your grandpapa, Bessie, brought it to me not long after your papa was born.”

“ What a singular coincidence !” cried Miss Dobbie ; “ and how was it made ?”

That Mrs. Barclay couldn't tell ; but Miss Dobbie could and did tell how hers was made, and all the adjuncts of her dress that night she danced with cousin Frank ; her memory was good, and it had not been burdened with much but the uneventful events of her own span of life. Many an hour she whiled away telling the beads of this peculiar rosary, or meditating over them : balls, parties, picnics, conversations, sermons—even sermons with texts, heads, and particulars—were all pinned to these remnants of faded grandeur.

By tea-time the two ladies had talked themselves into an appetite, and when Miss Barclay came in with a paper bag full of nice things, they were in a humour to enjoy them. Barbara never forgot any of

her; there were no loose ends in her housekeeping, and she had taught common things to a series of girls with such marked success, that she deserved a testimonial as a good servant of the state; and further, she kept sight of them in after-life, and was always ready with help and advice, which she did not distribute in brief lectures delivered from a pedestal, but in a quiet womanly way, thus gaining love and gratitude, when she did not think she had done anything to deserve either. People on the gape for gratitude rarely get it; if they are always meeting with shocking ingratitude, be sure there is a flaw in the administration of the article they demand it for. There is no forcing-house for such growths of human nature as love, gratitude, and respect; they are sensitive plants—if you catch at them they will shrink; but there are imitations of them, better and worse, always to be had for a price.

If Miss Dobbie had stepped directly from her

genteel independence into Mrs. Barclay's lofty and limited abode, she might not have been such a satisfactory inmate; but for several years she had been trying to fill situations for which she was wholly unfit, and glad was she to find herself at last under Miss Barclay's wing, by whom her little foibles were overlooked, and her modest wants attended to with what in time became loving care, which she repaid by any little service in her power.

Mrs. Barclay and Miss Dobbie had two common grounds on which they could meet and hold sweet fellowship,—the one was their trials, and the other was their gentility. Miss Dobbie's trials paled in the light of Mrs. Barclay's, because Mrs. Barclay had the better gift of utterance, and was persuaded no one ever was afflicted as she had been and was; whereas Miss Dobbie spoke of her calamities in the past tense, and had reached a tortoise-shell-cat contentment—was glad of a friendly hearth to bask on, and a friendly hand to stroke her.

They had not much society, these ladies, but what they had was of a kind they had the pleasure of patronising,—such as Mrs. Dods, their neighbour,

pany at least had a broad smile on her face ; and she had only to shake her shoulders, which she had a trick of doing, and you had laughter holding both his sides. The two genteel ladies, who had been accustomed to move in the best society, would have been ashamed to say how welcome Mrs. Dods's visits were ; and they generally remarked to each other, after she left, as an apology for their condescension, " Mrs. Dods is such a kind person, always ready to do you any little service—uncommonly kind." Mrs. Dods, on her side, imparted to her lodger her opinion, " that they werena ill bodies, but gey upsetting if they could get away wi't." Mrs. Dods kept lodgers ;—most people in that locality had more than one iron in the fire wherewith to weld the struggle for life.

Beside her sedate, sensible aunt, with her trim, plump figure, and dress that always fitted like a glove, and the other ladies getting into years and oddities, Bessie Barclay looked like a creature that

had got into the house by mistake. She was young, fair, and blithe. Her aunt might try to keep up her governessy manner while teaching her, but it was of no use; Bessie broke down all fences, and Miss Barclay could but relax into a smile and give in. Mrs. Dods being present when she was reading one evening, said—

“Bessie, ye read better than the minister.”

“Very much better,” Bessie agreed.

“Yes, Bessie,” said Miss Barclay, “you read very well; I trust before long you will be filling a place as an efficient teacher.”

“Teacher, aunt Bar. I’m not going to be a teacher—I’ve no patience for it.”

“You must cultivate patience, dear; unfortunately circumstances render it necessary that you employ yourself in some profitable way, and what else could you do?”

“Lots of things; I could keep a shop—a baker’s shop for instance.”

Mrs. Barclay groaned; what, she thought, would Mr. Barclay have said to his granddaughter keeping a baker’s shop? Miss Dobbie shivered a small shiver.

Aunt Bar. smiled at her niece's wit, and said, "It is not a particularly lucrative occupation, I believe."

"From 12s. to 20s. a-week. I would get 20s. in a west-end shop," said Bessie, "and I could live on that."

"It's trying for the breath," said Mrs. Dods. "Ye ken I ken fine what it is; it was a' I could do to stand it; ilka batch that comes in, the shop's filled wi' steam, and there's aye batches comin' in."

"My health would stand it capitally—it would be as good as a vapour-bath—and it's a simple business. I've enough mental arithmetic for it; all you have to do is to give a pennyworth more to everybody that buys a shilling's worth, and to send a cake of shortbread to all your customers at the New Year."

"That used to be the way," said Mrs. Dods, "but it's out o' the fashion now."

"Then that'll be my first reform, to bring back that excellent fashion."

"But it comes hard on the bakers too; a cake o' shortbread is little to ilka body, but twa-three hundred's a heap to the baker."

"That's the other side of the question. I'll think

over it; there's plenty of time to think or do anything in a baker's shop. I notice there are certain times people go for bread, the rest of the time you can do anything you like—keep a book in the counter-drawer and read when you like."

"That's your notion o' keepin' a shop, is't?" said Mrs. Dods; "weel, if ye get muckle read it's mair than I did. Frae the het rows in the morning till the last loaf at nicht I was never off my feet; then, frae the time o' the first rhubarb, till the last apple that's in the country, there's nae end to the tarts and pies sent to cover and fire, and, afore ye keep sicht o' them a', and see them a' sent to richt folk at the richt time, ye'll no make muckle o' your book. I mind there was a leddy had ae bawbee row sent to her every morning; and ance, when there was a new laddie that didna ken about things, I forgot the row; weel, she cam and kicket up sic a dust about it, ye wad hae thocht I had done something I should hae been hanged for, and I had to apologise and be unco ceevil a' the time I was just burstin' to gie her a bit o' my mind. Folk that keeps shops hae a hantle to put up wi'."

"I don't know the position in life," said Miss Barclay, "where people have not a very great deal to tolerate and overlook."

"When I lived with Miss Davie," Miss Dobbie was beginning, when a deep sigh from Mrs. Barclay startled her into silence. No one took any notice of it, and Bessie went on—"Then, if shopkeeping won't do, I could train myself to sing at concerts, or give readings: three guineas a-night people get for singing at concerts, that's eighteen guineas a-week, which is 936 guineas per annum. I don't know if they get as much for reading, but say from £500 to £600 a-year—we could do very well on that."

"Bessie, my dear," said her grandmamma, with sudden animation, "I could not approve of your father's daughter becoming a public singer, but reading is different—that's an accomplishment any lady might exercise without demeaning herself; if you could get £500 or £600 a-year for doing that, I for one would not object."

Mrs. Dods's smile had been gathering on her face, and her shoulders shook as she said, "Na, when she

gets it, ye mauna object to £600 a-year—it's no to be picket aff ilka door-step."

"£600 a-year won't keep a carriage," said Miss Dobbie. "Miss Davie kept a carriage, and hired horses as we needed them—fully a better plan than having them of one's own. Cousin Frank has a remarkably pretty turn-out just now—dark claret and a pair of grays. I saw it on the street the other day; Mrs. Dobbie was in it; she did not see me; she'll likely be calling one of these days."

Miss Barclay had not a quick sense of the absurd, but she had common sense, and she felt uncomfortable at the marked contrast between the actual circumstances and the strain of talk the ladies had got into. She did not object at all to their mounting their high horses in private, but she hastened to say, "Meantime, Bessie, you had better pay attention to your lessons, if you have to teach"——

"Teach!" said Mrs. Dods; "what's she to do teaching, or singing, or reading either?—the lassie'll be getting a man some day. But I maun awa' and get on the parritch; Mr. Pettigrew'll be in as hungry as a hawk." Mr. Pettigrew was her lodger.

a good education is never out of place in any position in life."

"Most women marry—why are you not married, Aunt Bar.?"

"For the same reason that may probably prevent you marrying, Bessie; but it's a subject I don't consider altogether suitable for discussing with you."

"Your aunt and I, dear, were very particular," said Miss Dobbie, briskly. "Miss Davie was a lady on whose judgment I placed the utmost reliance, and she always said, 'Jane Dobbie, don't throw yourself away.'"

"But people may be married without throwing themselves away; for instance, if Aunt Bar. were to marry Mr. Petti"—

"Bessie!" said Miss Barclay, in a warning voice.

"Marry who?" asked grandmamma.

"Oh, never mind; I was just speaking nonsense," said Bessie.

“ Miss Davie did not altogether disapprove of nonsense,” said that deceased lady’s friend ; “ she used to say that some people’s nonsense was better than other people’s sense.”

“ But mine isn’t,” said Bessie ; “ and no nonsense, I know, could hold the candle to Aunt Bar.’s sense.”

“ Then, once more, Bessie, my sense says, learn your lessons ; you’ve never really set about them to-night.”

“ Here goes then, Aunt Bar.”

CHAPTER IV.

MISS BARCLAY had laid the Bible on the table preparatory to reading from it to her small household—her way of shutting in the day; when the door-bell was heard to ring.

“Who can that be at this time of night?” said Miss Dobbie, who had economically changed her cap when the chance of visitors seemed over, and was afraid of being caught. A creak and a stride were heard in the passage, the door burst open, and a big tall man, in a greatcoat, having a shepherd’s plaid twisted round his neck, wearing his hat, and with a bright-coloured carpet-bag in his hand, entered. He dropped the bag and took off his hat, revealing a head small in proportion to his body, covered with long reddish hair, part of which dangled over one eye, and was being swept up every now and then with his hand—a hand of no ordinary size, and hairy below

the knuckles. In this formidable implement he imprisoned Mrs. Barclay's fingers closely, while he said, "I hope you are well, mem;" then, striding across the hearth, he said to Miss Dobbie, "And how are *you*—not feeling this change of weather? Are you troubled with rheumatism?" Imagine a man in his senses proposing rheumatism to Miss Dobbie. She said, "Sir?"

But Miss Barclay held out her hand pleasantly, and asked him to take a seat, which he did, remarking that Mrs. Dods was out, and as he hadn't his key, he would wait for a little. Then he observed the Bible, and said, "I see you have just been going to take the Books. I'll conduct the exercise, which may be agreeable as there is no male head of the house."

Mrs. Barclay bowed and sighed deeply. Bessie clutched her chair vigorously with one hand, to try to prevent herself giggling outright.

"We'll not sing," said Mr. Pettigrew; "for Mrs. Dods will think I'm late enough."

Miss Barclay looked warningly at her niece, who suddenly recovered her gravity.

"Where are you reading?" Mr. Pettigrew asked.
"You began Lamentations last time I was here."

"We shall go on with Lamentations to-night, please, Mr. Pettigrew," said Bessie, demurely.

"You will find a mark," interposed Miss Barclay,
"at the 27th chapter of Acts."

It mattered little to Mr. Pettigrew whether he read the lofty strains concerning her that sat solitary and desolate as a widow among the nations, or the life-like account of Paul's shipwreck. He had a powerful voice; but of the use or abuse of it he had no notion. You could not gather from his reading whether he understood what he read, far less felt it. If you can conceive of a stick of sound, or a string of sound, you may have some idea of it; and his prayer!—it had more the effect of the rapid running down of a machine that had been set to go a quarter of an hour than anything else. He got off his knees, and almost in a breath with his last words, said, "I'll be stepping. Good-night to you, ladies." With a general look round he grasped his bag and walked off.

"Now, Bessie," said Miss Barclay, when they were alone, "you must give up that style of joking

about Mr. Pettigrew. It is coarse and very unlady-like. I advise you also not to make a butt of him. Not that he is aware of it; but it is a very low kind of enjoyment for you, if you do enjoy it; and if he were aware of it, it would be very unkind."

"I'll try to be good; but one can't be perfect, Aunt Bar."

"No; but one can aim at perfection."

"I'll never be so good as you, auntie. What would Miss Dobbie think of hearing herself prayed for as the silly sheep that had happily wandered into our fold?"

"I don't think she would recognise herself by the description at all."

"He is an absurd gomer, Mr. Pettigrew."

"Now, there you are again, Bessie. I believe he is a good man, though not refined or sensitive."

"Auntie, you are too good for this world." Then, a minute after, "I say, auntie, an epidemic has broken out among my nightcap-strings, three have cracked off one after another; in that case what would you advise?"

"I advise you to mend them all thoroughly to-morrow."

"Them all! to-morrow—O auntie; but I may call in Miss Dobbie with her instruments, as consulting physician; may I not?"

"I would rather you did it yourself, Bessie. I would like you to grow useful and thoughtful. You are not quite a child now."

"No, indeed; I am sixteen past."

"I was little older than that when I began to teach, Bessie, and you know the money I get is what we have to live on. I never told you our circumstances particularly, for I could not have borne to see a child with a little careworn facey going about. I wanted your childhood to be as bright and happy as I could make it, so I have kept all my small sordid cares to myself, but now I would like you to think seriously, and my experience is that it is no great hardship to have to work for one's-self. I have known a good many idle ladies, and they are not to be envied, I assure you."

"O aunt, do you think so? I would think it

delightful to have plenty of money and not to need to do anything but what I liked."

"Well, that's always the class of people I pity. If people are to be happy they must work; even to be able to eat and sleep, people must work. Few persons have the energy and determination to go on working unless they are compelled. I have seen ladies tired of themselves and everything, actually losing their health merely from having nothing to do, or doing nothing, or at least nothing they had any satisfaction in looking back on."

"I always thought work was a punishment, and I think so yet, auntie, but I would not mind working occasionally as a change; and I think you could do very well with less than you have, and when the old lady at Blindpits leaves us her money—I heard grandmamma telling Mrs. Dods about it the other day—it will be very nice."

"Bessie, Bessie! Miss Boston may, I hope she will, live many many years yet; but if she were to die to-morrow, it is most probable that she won't leave us a farthing;—grandmamma wishes it, but that's all the ground she has to go upon."

"Then that's funny, for I heard her say she had often wished you to borrow on it."

Miss Barclay groaned in spirit; it seemed as if all the effects of her own teaching had been dispelled by the foolish talking of her mother.

"Would any one lend on such security, Bessie? But I am thankful I have never needed to borrow; and, Bessie, it would be sinful as well as foolish to fold our hands in expectation of Miss Boston's money."

"If I could do anything, auntie, but I am quite sure I couldn't go on teaching from year to year as you do; don't you think I might be trained to sing at concerts? I think my voice is marketable."

"Bessie, I could never allow that;" and Miss Barclay thought of her niece's youth and beauty.

"Nor reading?"

"Nor reading either. I don't object to the things, or to other people doing them, but I could not let you; and after all, if you are to make anything of them, they require as much assiduous labour and attention, or more even, than teaching."

"It must be an awful thing teaching—the A B C



for instance. Have you ever taught the A B C, auntie?"

"Many times."

"And how did you like it?"

"I did not like it. I do a great many things I don't like."

"But the A B C! I'll try to be good, auntie, and plodding."

Miss Barclay had not ruled her niece with an iron rule. She began to blame herself for her lax discipline as probably tending to make Bessie unfit for her lot; but had she exerted on her behalf all the unyielding firmness that made her outdoor pupils always so respectful and obedient, she might have made her different a little from what she was, but she could never have turned out a second edition of herself.

CHAPTER V.

BESSIE BARCLAY'S grand resource both as to work and amusement was books. Now two, or at most three, books per annum quite sufficed for the wants of the other members of the household, and Aunt Barbara had never joined a library,—it did not strike her as one of the necessities of life ; but although she did not at all approve of miscellaneous reading, no doubt she would have indulged Bessie in this, only Mr. Dods — Mrs. Dods's husband — supplied her wants. Perhaps you thought Mrs. Dods was a widow—not at all ; only she kept the pot boiling, and Mr. Dods had to walk softly. As you will infer, he had been a baker, but had not baked to much purpose. He was, and had always been, addicted to books, and at one time had been fond of his tumbler ; these tastes perhaps had something to do with his non-success in business. He had a property from



which he drew a net revenue of twelve pounds per annum; out of that sum he had to find himself in everything but food. First and last he had collected a good many books, and books of reputation, and for the time they had been neighbours Bessie Barclay had had the benefit of them.

Mrs. Dods was not slow to declare that they were "just a wheen rubbish, fit for nothing but to take up room and gather dust;" but she allowed them to stand on some shelves in the passage behind the door—a situation perfectly dark—and she on no pretext would allow the gas to be lit during the day; but Mr. Dods could generally put his hand on what he wanted, and if not, he kept a box of lucifers in a corner, and drew one to help his search, carefully putting the extinct match in his pocket, for to leave it lying about was to bring reproof about his ears. He was a thin man, with bent shoulders and a cadaverous complexion. He despised Pettigrew for his ignorance, for his boorishness, and because it is a comfort to despise somebody. Also he felt savage when he thought of a creature like Pettigrew having in a measure the command of the public ear; while he, Thomas Dods,

had found door after door barred in his face when he wanted but a few minutes' speech with the public.

Mr. Pettigrew, it may be said, was what in Scotland is called a probationer. He had been on his probation for fifteen years, and during that time had preached as constantly as he was paid for it; to preach gratuitously did not strike him as fulfilling the end of preaching.

Mr. Dods was a poet, and he would have been content—content! he would have been jubilant—if he could only have seen one of his brain-children decently clad in print, all sordid considerations apart, for he was not mercenary; but oh! if he could have sold one absolutely, how gladly he would have done so; that would have silenced Mrs. Dods for ever; for, like too many of the wives of geniuses, she would have appreciated her husband's talents if they could have been transmuted into hard cash; as it was, she gave the palm to Pettigrew, who for fifteen years had lived on ten sermons, and even saved money. It is open to all men to deserve success, but to few to command; so Mr. Dods submitted to his fate, retain-



ing always the consolation of looking down on Mr. Pettigrew openly when his wife was in good humour, privately when she was not.

He could not gain the public ear, but he must have a confidant, and he had two. They did not know each other, so there could be no collusion, and if each independently thought so highly of his verses they must be good. When he took in Mr. Richardson's (his, or rather his wife's, other lodger) hot water of a morning, he would begin reading his last effusion. Richardson would say, "That's good, Mr. Dods, very good, immensely superior to most of the so-called poetry that's published; if I had any influence with editors you would see that in print, but I'm sorry to say I have none, and it's all influence that does it." Then Mr. Dods's head, that hung forward as if it were too heavy for his long, slender neck, would raise itself a little, and a glow would suffuse his sallow face, and he would lay the breakfast in a kind of dream, muttering, "Yes, it's all influence, all influence." And when Bessie Barclay popped in during the forenoon, as she often did, and kept him company while he

was dusting Mr. Richardson's sitting-room, he would produce the poem to her, and she would say, "Oh, Mr. Dods, I could fancy that Gray or Collins." He modelled himself on the older poets; the modern school of poetry was unintelligible to him. "Yes," he rejoined, "Mr. Richardson tells me it's quite another thing from most of the trash that's printed now-a-days."

"You should get it printed, Mr. Dods."

"It's easy speaking, but Mr. Richardson says it's no merit that's the thing, it's influence, and I believe it; an ounce of influence with an editor is worth a pound o' merit."

"That's very unfair," cries Bessie, warmly; "I wonder they don't see they're standing in their own light."

"They know what suits their public best probably," said Mr. Dods, loftily; "before some things are appreciated, you must educate the public taste up to them."

"Tammaas," said Mrs. Dods, showing her face at the door, "if you're dune wi' that room, ye had better be parin' the taties."



It is quite true that, even in his happiest moments of inspiration, Mr. Dods was exposed to interruptions of this kind ; nay, more, he was expected to keep all the tins and brasses in the house bright, and the bane of his life was three pairs and a half of candlesticks that never were used, and a brass pan that was only used once a-year, but which, nevertheless, had to be kept in a high state of polish : it was worse than vain to suggest that they might be disposed of in some way. "Na, na, Tammas," Mrs. Dods would say ; "ye're better polishing them than yer verses,—the verses are never seen, but the candlesticks are the ornament o' the kitchen, and ye maun just educate yer taste up to them." When in the humour, Mrs. Dods could tip her arrows with poison.

But worse even than the candlesticks, Mr. Dods had to polish the boots of the house. If you have ever at all entered into Samson's feelings when he was grinding for the Philistines, you may be able to form some distant idea of how Mr. Dods was affected when he was cleaning Pettigrew's boots. In addition to these labours, Mr. Dods was expected to turn up his sleeves, don an apron, and set to work whenever

any article was wanted for household consumption, into the composition of which flour entered ; possibly, if he had sent some of his triumphs in this line to editors, they might have been more appreciated than his poems.

Mr. Pettigrew did not get many letters ; but he was always expecting some of the last importance. If any of Mr. Dods's children were out, trying to push their way in the world, *he* was always expecting letters of the highest moment also ; consequently, when the postman's ring occurred, it was often a neck-or-nothing race which should be first at the door. If Mr. Pettigrew got the letters, he did not let them out of his hands till he had examined them at his leisure, making a running commentary on them all the time—"Graham Richardson, Esq.—London post-mark—woman's hand—has Richardson friends in London ? I could easily find that out—Richardson, Richardson—I think they're all for him together—what's this ?" and he looked at a thick oblong packet, gay with postage stamps ; he weighed it in his hand, scrutinised the post-mark, and then said, "I think, Mr. Dods, this is for you."

"Think! give it to me instantly," cried Mr. Dods.

Mr. Dods, though filled with contempt and anger, is granted enough presence of mind to take the packet as a thing of course, to lay it down, to pick up Mr. Richardson's letters, and take them to that gentleman's room, to return (Mr. Pettigrew hanging about all the while), drop the bulky missive into his pocket, take up the newspaper and begin to read, or to affect to read, for although his eyes were on the page, his mind was in the bottom of his pocket.

"Are you not going to read it?" said Mr. Pettigrew, impatiently.

"Yes, I was thinking of reading it, but if you want it"—and he held out the newspaper. Mr. Pettigrew retired, assuring himself that sooner or later he would master the contents of that letter.

Mrs. Dods was out, but she might come in immediately; moreover, Pettigrew could invent an errand to bring him to the kitchen at any moment, so Mr. Dods withdrew to Mr. Richardson's sitting-room, and quietly turned the key upon himself. Hitherto, when he had sent his children out into the world, like Noah's

dove they had never come back to him ; of course he had duplicates, and if he had been roused from sleep at the dead of night he could have repeated them all from beginning to end ; but he knew this envelope was big with their fate, and he wanted no vulgar eye to watch his virgin feelings as he opened it. He found his offspring returned to him in good repair, and a note—his hand trembled as he held it. “The editor of the *Ironburgh Magazine* begs to return Mr. D—’s MSS. He regrets doing so, as they have very considerable merits. He would advise Mr. D—— to stick firmly to whatever trade or profession he has chosen, and to make poetry only the amusement of his leisure-hours ; above all, to avoid publication till he is older and has seen more of the world, when his riper judgment will probably lead him to continue in the course pointed out.”

The poor old man’s face was indeed a study as he read this ; one feels thankful that there was no rude, unsympathetic spirit present to witness it ; but with the infatuation, or shall we call it the happy fortune of his genus, he fixed on the words in that brief note which to his eyes stood out in double pica—“very



considerable merit." The editor "regretted" returning them, then why did he do it? was it possible he might suppose a high price would be expected for them; if that were the case he might have them at his own price or for nothing—any or all of them. Merely to see them in print, only to see "Ode to Spring," by T. D., advertised among the contents of the *Ironburgh Magazine*, would be ample reward. He would re-enclose them to the friendly editor, and let him know that they were entirely at his disposal.

"I wouldn't do that if I were you, Mr. Dods," said Mr. Richardson, who got the note to read at the earliest opportunity; "there's no use of making one's-self too cheap." Mr. Richardson did not attach the amount of meaning to the editor's "regret" that the poet did; he saw it as a polite phrase merely, or if used with consideration at all, only intended as an anodyne to the supposed youth's mortified feelings at rejection, and he wanted to have Mr. Dods spared the pain of a second rebuff.

"Much better to keep them for the use of your private friends and yourself, Mr. Dods. The man is no doubt a good judge, and he admits their excellence,

"May be, may be," said Mr. Dods; "but isn't it a queer notion o' the man to think I'm a callant?"

"Well, I don't know if it is; it is the special characteristic of genius, you know, that it is always young. No, no; I think the man showed his discernment there."

"Weel, if ye tak that view o't"——

"To be sure, what other view could I take?"

"That didna strike me; he says, 'On no account publish till you're older;' if he kent I was up to the threescore he would think I hadna muckle time to put off."

Mr. Richardson had not time to pursue the subject farther, and when he went away the big-type sentence, "very considerable merit," resumed its place in front of Mr. Dods's eyes, his tongue kept constantly repeating it, it seemed to mix with the very blood in his body. He went through his work with a speed that astonished his wife, shaved himself and put on his best coat to call at Mrs. Barclay's on the chance of a

private interview with Bessie, that he might tell her the news.

Bessie was alone; her grandmamma was still in bed, and Miss Dobbie was in the retirement of her own room wearing her crown of blotting-paper.

In a few minutes she had the wonderful note in her hand. "Oh, how funny that he should think you a boy!" was her first exclamation; "he must not be so clever as the people who advertise that they will tell you your age, sex, and character, if you send them a specimen of your writing and two dozen and a half postage-stamps."

"I wondered at it myself, but Mr. Richardson seemed to think it no such an unnatural mistake."

"Well, when one thinks of it, neither it is; and this is from an editor! I wonder what like he is. It must be a disagreeable business always sending things back."

"Ay, especially if he would like to keep them; you see he regrets sending mine back."

"I see, because they have considerable merit."

"*Very* considerable merit," said Mr. Dods.

"That's true, I'm sure, and I think they would look better in print than even in writing; I

wonder he did not keep them; what could be the reason?"

"Dear kens," said Mr. Dods; "maybe he would think I would bogle about terms; I was thinking to send them back, and say I wad let him get them on his ain terms."

"That's the very thing to do," cried Bessie; "how surprised aunt will be when she sees them, and grandmamma, and Miss Dobbie, and everybody. Will he put one in next month?—likely; oh, it will be capital!"

Mr. Dods saw the thing done; the "Ode to Spring" was to be the first blossom of his fame, he would pluck the ripe fruit yet; and he left Bessie thinking her a miracle of sense for her years. His thin frame expanded, his wrinkled cadaverous face lighted up, as he went to the stationer's and bought one big envelope and sixpence worth of stamps. That afternoon his offspring departed.

"I hope you got no bad news the day?" said Mr. Pettigrew, dropping in on his landlady while her husband was absent.

"Bad news!—what puts that in yer head?"

“ Mr. Dods got an uncommon-looking letter this morning, and seemed feared to open it.”

“ A letter—and feared to open it ! I never heard tell o’t.”

“ He made a mystery of it to me ; I have no wish to know anything about it, only if he is in any trouble I might be able to give a word of exhortation.”

“ Trouble ! he’s in nae trouble or I wad hae heard o’t or this time, and I’m no that ill at exhortin’ mysel’. He’s been a simple man Tammas Dods, and the simple man’s the beggar’s brother ; but he wad hardly rin into ony new mischief an me no ken.”

Mr. Pettigrew ensconced himself in a chair by Mrs. Dods’s fire ; she always had a good fire, and he had not, for he supplied his own coals ; besides, he was in the habit of sitting by the hour with his head nearly up the chimney, beating a tattoo on the upper bar of the grate, which he could hardly have done had he kept a roaring fire.

The popular idea of the “ sticket minister ” is a thin, narrow-chested individual, studious, and of mental ability, but with a morbid consciousness destroying self-possession, and farther borne to the earth

healthy—there was not enough of it to harbour disease. What put it into his head to attempt the ministry he knows best, and how the net of the reverend fathers with whom he had to do on the way to his goal was so large in the mesh as to let him through, they know best. Looking at his physical frame, one would have said that he might have attained eminence if he had betaken himself to countries where men are famous as they bring down the axe upon the thick trees, but he had no notion of hard work or expatriation, and there he was a decent honest man, no doubt, who might have been respectable had he not been in a false position, out of which he did not think of extricating himself.

He sat and sunned himself in front of Mrs. Dods's fire, employed watching her operations. She had on her spectacles, and was picking peas for soup.

“How do you buy your split-pease?” asked he.

“Buy them?”

“ Ay—do you buy them, in pounds, or how ? ”

“ How wad I buy them but a pound or twa at a time ? ”

“ Because if you were to buy a bushel at once it would be an immense saving.”

“ A bushel ! whan wad Tammas an’ me eat a bushel o’ split-pease ? ”

“ They’ll keep, Mrs. Dods—they’ll keep, and I would take the half of them.” •

“ Weel, keep or no keep, I’m no gaun to hae a bushel o’ split-pease in this house ; I’ve nae room for them, but if I had the mice wad dae naething but gulravitch amang them.”

“ You should get a cat, Mrs. Dods.”

“ That’s aye what Tammas says, whenever the mice dae ony mischief, ‘ Oh, ye should get a cat.’ Weel, if you an’ him ’ll just tak it atween ye to herd her an’ keep her off that dresser, ye’re welcome, but I’m gaun to be the slave o’ nae cat ; I made up my mind to that when I got the last ane out o’ the house—better pison them as Miss Barclay does.”

“ Ay, she poisons them, does she ? What does she pison them with ? ”

“Arsenic ; but I dinna think it's ower chancey a thing to hae about a house. She says she keeps it aye lockit up in her desk ; but I rather try the trap—see, there it's ; an' ye may set it if ye like, as ye're no unco thrang. There's a bit cheese, an' gie't a good birsel.”

“You'll not know, Mrs. Dods, what Miss Barclay gets for keeping that Miss Dobbie ?”

“No ; I never speired,” said Mrs. Dods, sharply.

“No ; but she might have told you.”

“But she didna. She can keep her thumb on her ain concerns as weel as some mair o' us, Peter ; but then she disna howk into other folk's affairs either. If ye want to get to the bottom o' things, try the auld wife.” (Imagine Mrs. Barclay hearing herself described as the “auld wife.”)

“They spoil that girl Betsy amoung them,” said Mr. Pettigrew.

“I'll no say that ; but Miss Barclay's wonderfu' fond o' her. I warrant she's lost as mony nights' sleep thinking about her as if she had been her mother.”



"No, Mrs. Dods, the same solicitude does not reside in the bosom of an aunt; but no doubt she is *in loco parentis*."

"Weel, ye had better be loco-parentising yoursel' out o' this; for I'm gaun to clean up the fireside an' mak a stour."

Mr. Pettigrew, having manipulated the mouse-trap, retired to his own small chamber, to meditate on Mr. Dods's letter, and, most probably, on the great split-pea question and cognate topics.

Mr. Dods came in at the dinner-hour, and his wife waited to hear if he would disclose, of his own accord, the news of the mysterious letter. Mr. Dods had got into those habits of silence which people learn who rarely have a sympathising audience; and, though still in a little excitement, he did not speak. He thought coyly of his secret, as a girl does of her first love. His wife sat watching him as he ate his soup absently, with sometimes a kind of smile on his face. Her temper did not improve as she sat thinking of the trials and burdens that had been the staple of her married life.

‘What letter did ye get this morning, Tammas?’ she broke forth sharply and suddenly.

“Letter?” he said, gaining a moment’s time to think whether he would reveal his treasure, or keep it till a yet more triumphant moment.

“Ay, letter,” said his wife. “It wadna be a tax-paper, or I wad hae gotten’t soon enuech.”

Yes, he would give it to her, and let her see, that whatever she thought, other people at least could understand his merits. He handed it to her. She put on her spectacles and read it. After she had read it, she looked over the rim of her glasses with an amused expression, and said, “’Od, Tammas, he thinks ye’re a bit laddie—and in a sense he’s no far wrang—an’ he advises ye to stick to yer trade. If ye had ta’en my advice to that effect mony a year sin’, it wad hae been tellin’ baith you and me; but it canna be helpit now. A gude loaf aye sells, but metre!—even if what the man says is true, what can ye mak o’t?”

Mrs. Dods spoke resignedly. Insensibly she had been soothed by the verdict on her husband’s

verses ; and she had been touched, as well as tickled, by the contrast between the supposed youth and her husband sinking into old age. She continued, " Weel, Tammas, if ye're done wi' yer denner, ye may lay Mr. Richardson's cloth as lang as it's licht, and it'll be ready."

CHAPTER VI.

ON the morning when Mr. Pettigrew took in the large envelope containing Mr. Dods's promising family, he saw the postman step across the passage to Mrs. Barclay's door, and if he had given way to his customary thirst for information, he would have followed him with the view of examining the Barclay letters; but he contented himself with merely turning over in his mind all the probabilities respecting them. But he did not imagine the big stone that was that morning splashed into their usually quiet pool.

The four ladies were seated at breakfast. They were not accustomed to a sheaf of letters every day. Indeed, a single letter dropping in was the exception rather than the rule. When the servant entered, Miss Dobbie extended her hand for the letter; but the girl passed, and laid it on the table beside Miss Barclay, who was engaged making tea.

“Not for me!” said Miss Dobbie; “that *is* curious. I was expecting a note of invitation to Dobbiestanes for their party on Christmas evening. They always have a family party on Christmas evening. I have not been at it so regularly of late years as I used to be; one year it was not convenient, another I had cold, and another they stupidly forgot to post my note in time; but I think I’ll go this season. What do you think I should wear, Mrs. Barclay?”

“I’m so little in the world now,” said Mrs. Barclay, with a heavy sigh, “that I can hardly give an opinion. Are you not going to read that letter, Barbara?”

“Yes, mamma, immediately.”

“I was thinking,” pursued Miss Dobbie, “of a black lace shawl over my pearl-gray satin, with a green head-dress having a single pink moss-rose in the side; that would be lady-like—not too elderly, do you think?—matronly enough, perhaps.”

“What is it, Barbara. You look as if it were something more than usual.”

“It is from a Dr. M’Vicar.”

“Dr. M’Vicar! who in the world is that?”

"The Queen's private secretary most likely," said Bessie. "Her Majesty will be wanting Aunt Bar. as governess to the royal children."

"Have you any interest at court, Miss Barclay?" said Miss Dobbie; "several of Miss Davie's pupils were presented at court. I never was myself, but Mrs. Frank Dobbie was, upon her marriage, by the Countess of Whims. Governess to the royal children! I should think that would be a good appointment."

"Bessie was speaking nonsense, Miss Dobbie; you might know her by this time. Dr. M'Vicar, mother, is a medical man at Heatherburgh; he writes to say that Miss Boston is"——

"Gone?" broke in Mrs. Barclay, excitedly.

"No, mother; but I'll read what he says:—'Dear Madam—Though a stranger, I take the liberty of addressing you, to let you know that Miss Boston is suffering from severe influenza. She has no one with her but a servant, and I suggested the propriety of sending for some female friend. You may be aware that Miss Boston is a little peculiar, and at first she did not receive my suggestion with much favour; but to-day she consented that I should write to you and

ask you to come, so I trust that, if possible, you will not lose time in coming; it will be a charity.—I am, dear madam, yours truly, JOHN M'VICAR.'"

Mrs. Barclay was in a great flutter, and would have hurried her daughter off on the instant; but Barbara declined such a sudden exodus, and quietly remarked, "she would go next day—a day couldn't make much difference."

"It may make all the difference. Miss Boston might take it as a slight, and alter her will; but you're always so cool; I daresay if the city were bombarded, you would look if your gloves needed mending before you tried to escape."

"How long will you stay?" asked Miss Dobbie.

"Not longer than the holidays, if so long."

"They'll be dull here when we're both away," Miss Dobbie said.

"And, Barbara, you'll see the Grants of course; I've no doubt they visit often enough at Blindpits. If I were you I would show Mr. Grant you did not forget his shameful conduct to those that are gone; for I blame him—I don't blame Barbara Boston—there is no question he poisoned her ear."

"If he did, it was disgraceful," said Bessie warmly.

"You don't know what you are talking about, Bessie," said her aunt.

Miss Barclay was far from being a fluttered unprotected female ; she could travel as judiciously as she could do everything else. A first-class ticket would have suited her tastes and leanings, a third-class her purse, so she compromised the matter and took second class. You will readily understand that the great heart of the universe did not beat in her sufficiently to make her enjoy the humours of third-class travelling ; in short, she shrank from chaff and slang.

She took her place in an empty carriage ; Bessie stood beside her, and they kept on having more last words. "I think you are going to have the carriage to yourself, auntie ; dignity is a dull thing, I would have taken third class."

"Now, Bessie, see that you keep things comfortable, and don't idle your time ; just go on with your lessons as usual."

"I'll work double tides, never fear, and I'll get Mr. Dods to put a crust on a very big pasty that'll

nearly serve till you come back, then I'll not be distracted about dinner."

"Bessie, I'm afraid of the foolish things you'll do in my absence."

"Don't be afraid—oh! positively—yes it is—Mr. Pettigrew coming along and looking for a seat; you'll get him to travel with, and it will be such an ease to my mind."

Mr. Pettigrew, having caught sight of Bessie, hurried up. "How is Miss Betsy to-day?" he said; "are you going by this train?"

"Who—I? No, I'm not going certainly."

He spied Miss Barclay in her corner, and asked where she was going, and said, "That's the very place I'm going to; you had better come out and take third class with me."

"Thank you, I'll do very well here."

"If the thing is explained, you'll get back the difference of the tickets when we come out."

"Perhaps, but I'm quite comfortable; I'll just stay where I am, thank you."

"I think you're wrong. I'll have to take my seat, but you'll know that I'm in the train."

"Thank you, I'll keep that in mind."

"Auntie, your empire is shaking; he didn't think of getting a second-class ticket."

"I'm thankful it didn't occur to him; it couldn't occur to him—such an idea."

"Then you're off; if you feel dull or eerie, remember *he* is in the train."

Mr. Pettigrew wondered at his own boldness in his brief interview with Miss Barclay. Like the cock, when on his own eminence he could be bold enough, but elsewhere he had two phases—either he was too forward or he was too backward. The falseness of his position, so far as he was able to take it in, probably aggravated these failings. Whether he was a holy man or not does not need to be here said; certainly he did not exhibit the beauty of holiness, if there is such a thing as the ugliness of holiness, he possibly exemplified that. If he had got a church—and considering his voice it is a wonder he had not—he would have been different; with an assured position his own assurance would have been better balanced. However, he had not a church, and it was well—it was better than well.



At D—— he waylaid Miss Barclay, and found to his astonishment that she was going farther, but to what precise place she did not inform him. People that knew Mr. Pettigrew had a wicked pleasure in not making him any wiser than they could help, and finally he went on his way.

During the latter part of her journey Miss Barclay had one fellow-traveller, a man getting to middle age, of goodly size and well-favoured countenance; but Barbara did not amuse herself speculating on people with whom she had nothing to do; she was aware of his presence, but little more.

On his part, Mr. Goldie—that was his name—was struck with the sweet serene face opposite him. It was turned towards the window and away from him, and the profile was very good; the eyes were fixed in reverie, and the lips were slightly apart, and there was a kind of wistfulness in the expression that interested him. He surveyed the trim figure and the well-appointed dress, and wondered where she would be going, and whether any one waited for her—it was a dark bleak night—and why that shade of sadness was in her face: her dress was not black.

Now, to tell the exact truth, Barbara had fallen into a brown study, first, in thinking over the contents of her purse, and coming to the conclusion that she had left a sixpence lying on the board when she took her ticket. It worried her to have lost sixpence in this way, it worried her much more than people with whom sixpences are plentiful could imagine; she looked wistful about it. If her fellow-traveller could have guessed her thoughts, would he have been amused? for a little, perhaps, and then I think he would have been grieved. When sixpences come to be objects of serious consideration, it argues a grievous want of money; and a want of money brings a host of petty depressing cares, apt to bend or break even a noble spirit.

Then she had thought of Blindpits and her old friend there, and that had brought up the past very vividly; and there were many things in the past which she found it her best wisdom to shut out of her thoughts—if she could.

When the train stopped at the Heatherburgh station she rose to get out.

“Allow me,” said Mr. Goldie; “I go out here too;”

and he stepped down and handed her out. He was inclined to ask if she went his way, and to offer her a drive, but he could not take that liberty. Ignorant of the kind thoughts expended on her, Barbara stood at the door of the station, and saw one vehicle after another receive its freight and move off, from the carriage-and-pair to the farm-cart, but no one asked for her; she had hardly expected that she would be sent for; it was so long since she had been an object of attention that it seemed quite natural she should be left to shift for herself.

Out from the glow of light she stepped into what seemed by contrast pitchy darkness. There had been a heavy fall of snow some days before, and it was still lying, but a partial thaw had set in which surcharged the roads with a thick sloppy gravy, in which your feet slipped back nearly as fast as you put them forward. A man with a lantern passed her, but he walked so quickly that the little light faded in the distance like a star of hope. The snow, however, mitigated the darkness. As she climbed the hill, she was fain to use her umbrella to aid her; when she stood still to take breath, and looked back,

she saw a young moon like half a silver ring lying trembling on the edge of the sea. Barbara was not imaginative; leaving a glow of light and warmth and going into outer darkness had conjured up no thoughts in her to make her shudder, nor was she cheered by that pale young crescent glittering in the gloom as if it were a gleam from a door of heaven to lead her on. All she thought was that she was having an uncomfortable walk, and right glad was she when the friendly lights of Heatherburgh came in sight. She remarked, in passing, that this village was keeping pace with the times; it had got side pavements, gas, and a new west end, so that she hardly knew it; but very well she knew the half-mile of road between it and Blindpits—it was unchanged.

When she got to Miss Boston's door, there was not a vestige of light about the house, and everything was still as the grave. But she remembered the kitchen was at the back, and so was Miss Boston's bedroom, and reassured she pulled the bell. In about five minutes the door was opened by a big rustic lad in moleskins, with his hair all on end as if

from fright; he held a candle high above his head and simply stared.

"Miss Boston, how is she?" said Barbara.

The lad stood up against the door, and motioned her past him, "Gang in, gang in," said he; "she's pittin' on her gown."

She entered, and the youth marshalled her along the passage with the tramp of a horse, he threw open a door, and again said, "Gang in, an' I'll tell her."

As Barbara went into the room a man jumped off the sofa. "Is this?—this is not"—

"Miss Barclay," said Barbara.

"Ay, well I thought so. I'm Dr. M'Vicar. I'm glad you're come. I was just taking a nap; I was up all night, and a medical man sleeps when he can."

He had taken her hand and seated her on the sofa beside himself; he still held her hand, and spoke confidentially as if to a friend of thirty years' standing.

"How did you come, Miss Barclay?"

"By the railway, and walked from the station."

"No! Walked from the station in a night like this? You are a heroine!"

"How is Miss Boston?"

"Better, I do think, better. It is an illness a young person would have got easily through; but at her time of life, you know—at her time of life"—

"Yes; it is a very long time since I have seen her; perhaps it would be as well if you would let her know that I am here."

"Certainly—certainly. You will be a comfort to her; at least you will be a great comfort to me. A good nurse, I always say, a good nurse is worth half a medical man. When I've got a nurse for a patient that will carry out my directions, then I'm at ease."

The doctor went upstairs. Barbara surveyed the room she was in. Poor as she was, her own home had an air of comfort that was wanting here;—walls on which the paint had worn bare, old tables with a multitude of straight thin legs, old chairs and old sofa; a modern grate, guiltless of polish, however, but filled with a great reckless fire, a mountain of cinders and ashes on the hearth, and dust everywhere, it looked as if it had been lifted bodily out of a railway-station and set down in its present place. Two tall thin candles in silver candlesticks were burn-



ing on the middle table, that stye of candle with solemn dreary wicks, whose merit is that they don't need snuffing; as if snuffing the candle was not an accomplishment and an amusement—really a resource during a long winter night in the country. Yet, undoubtedly, it was the same room she had been accustomed to as a child, with the additional wear and tear of years and no renewal; and, after all, dreary as it looked, it was very much less changed than she was.

A person she supposed to be Miss Boston's servant came into the room and attacked the fire vigorously, probably to keep herself in countenance.

"You'll be the Miss Barclay that the doctor tell'd me was comin'. I was pittin' on my gown when ye cam' to the door, and the laddie had to open it."

"Is Miss Boston able to be up?"

"Up! she's no' been out o' her bed for a fortnight. Puir body, she's gey silly now."

The doctor returned, and said, "Bell, your mistress says you're to get tea immediately for Miss Barclay, or whatever she would prefer."

"I may go up and see Miss Boston now, Doctor?"

“Certainly, and I’ll bid you good night. I’ve left a draught on the table, you’ll see; you may give her it at ten o’clock; it is to make her sleep; and I’ll look in to-morrow forenoon.”

Two dreary deadlight-looking candles were burning in Miss Boston’s room too, and the same kind of fire as downstairs, but on a lesser scale. Miss Boston was propped up by pillows in bed, but her face was in the shade, and the ravages which time and illness had made were not distinctly visible.

She said, “Is that you, Barbara?”

“Yes, Miss Boston,” and Barbara stooped and kissed her.

It was long—oh, how long!—since lips had been pressed to that old face; then there was silence. If Miss Boston had spoken at that moment she must have sobbed; and to betray emotion of that kind would have been to her proof that her mind was failing as well as her body. In a little she told her visitor to go downstairs and see if she could get anything to eat, and “look after yersel,’ Barbara; for if Bell’s in ane o’ her pavees, she’ll no be ower gracious.”

Barbara was very wearied, and she sat down to



table faint but not appetised, and the tall sepulchral candles with the drooping wicks were not very cheerful company. So she finished her meal in a few minutes, and finding that her patient had fallen asleep, she lay down on a sofa in her room and was soon asleep also.

She was shortly roused by Miss Boston coughing, coughing as if she would choke, and Barbara sprang up ashamed of herself, and hastened to support her friend.

“Thank ye !” the old lady gasped as she was able. When she was laid back on the pillows, and had rested a little, Barbara said, “That’s a terrible cough ; can the doctor do nothing for it ?”

“Do !” said Miss Boston ; “he thinks he can do wonders, puir man, but it’s ill tinkerin’ an auld pan.”

As if to confirm this observation, in spite of the doctor’s sleeping draught, his patient not only did not sleep, but coughed continuously. It was a marvel how she stood it ; and Barbara was up and down the whole night—not that she could do much beyond showing sympathy in any way that occurred to her. Miss Boston suffered much, and no position gave her ease, but she made no complaint ;

only once, in an interval of coughing, Barbara heard her say, as if to herself, "Oh, what is't that glues us to this life?" It was a touching question. Miss Boston might shrink from death, as everything that has life is known to do, but it does not follow that she was wholly unprepared for it, although I have small doubt that people in the neighbourhood, whose religion was of the fussy order, thought her little better than an old heathen, and I don't mean to deny that she had her heathenish points,—most people have.

The long December night came to an end in that room, as well as in thousands of sick-rooms, the inmates of which had been saying, "Would God it were morning!" and Barbara was shocked to see in the light of day the change on Miss Boston since she had known her. Then she was in hale middle life, and looked ten years younger than she was; now her face was worn and anxious and pinched, her nose was more prominent than ever, her teeth were gone, and senile down was on her chin; but there was no senility in her mind—that was as clear and sound as ever, and neither had her sight nor hearing failed. She sat up



in bed and ate a breakfast very tolerable for an invalid (old-fashioned constitutions had a world of wear and tear in them), and then lay down and slept peacefully for some hours. Barbara took advantage of this to write home.

“ *Blindpits, December 18, —*

“My dear Mother,—You will be happy to learn that I arrived here in perfect safety last evening. I cannot say that my journey was a pleasant one ; but at this season of the year, and with the prospect of seeing an old and valued friend suffering from illness, it would have been unreasonable to expect much pleasure. Miss Boston has altered much in appearance since I saw her last, which I ought not to have been surprised at, as it is the necessary consequence of the flight of time—it does not pass over any of us innocuously ; but she is not so ill as I was led to expect, I am thankful to say. She had a bad night owing to a severe cough, but if she could secure immunity from it, I sincerely trust she would not be long of being restored to a comparative measure of health.

“The medical man is an old, friendly, sensible

gentleman, upon whom I would be disposed to place considerable reliance. I don't think, from the little I have seen, that Miss Boston is very fortunate in her servant, which is the more to be regretted as she is so dependent on a servant. For Bessie's information, I may say that I was alone half of the journey, and during the last half had the company of only one stout elderly gentleman."

(Mr. Goldie, by the way, had forgotten the face he had been taken with before he was ten yards from the station; but it had come up to him in his dreams, and he had said to himself while dressing, 'It was a sweet face; I am rarely mistaken in a face, and you was one to be trusted.' He did not see that face again for many months, and when he did see it, it was in circumstances so unexpected that even his faith in it was staggered.)

"Bessie will write very soon; I hope she is keeping you comfortable. Give my love to Miss Dobbie, and believe me, my dear mother, ever your affectionate daughter,

BARBARA BARCLAY.

"P.S.—The country here is covered with snow, and a thermometer outside Miss Boston's window is

down so low as 22°. The stars were uncommonly bright last night, or rather this morning, when I looked out between two and three."

"That's a most unsatisfactory letter—most unsatisfactory," said Mrs. Barclay, when she had heard her granddaughter read it aloud; "but Barbara is always like herself."

"But is it not satisfactory to know that she arrived safely?"

"What was to prevent her doing that, I wonder?"

"There might have been a railway accident," suggested Miss Dobbie.

"But there was not," Mrs. Barclay said testily; "who cares what the medical man is? and the idea of telling us about the thermometer! She knows my anxiety, yet catch her say how she was received, or if she has found out the terms of the will."

"How could she know about the will, grand-mamma, unless she asked the old lady point-blank, and she could hardly do that?"

"She'll take her own way," groaned Mrs. Barclay; "she'll just come back as wise as she went. If she

doesn't ask direct, Barbara Boston is not the woman to be pumped."

"And very right," said Miss Dobbie. "Miss Davie, who was reckoned an uncommonly wise, prudent person, used to warn me; she would say, 'Jane, my dear, there's not much worldly wisdom in that pretty little head of yours, but you might learn not to say all you think to every one.' And I have learned, Mrs. Barclay—I have learned—what poet is it that says, 'Sharp are the uses of adversity?'"

"They are sharp enough in all conscience," said Mrs. Barclay. "Bessie, sit down and write to your aunt immediately, and we'll hear the sooner from her again; don't say anything about me expecting information as to the will though, for that would be enough to prevent her ever mentioning it," and Mrs. Barclay groaned.

"And, Bessie," said Miss Dobbie, "you may tell her from me, that I have got my dress very nicely arranged for the Dobbiestanes party, and say that I hope she is enjoying herself, and that her dear old friend is getting better, and that we expect the weather will soon be warmer, and that I hope they

have good fires, but they always have in country-houses. I mind, Miss Davie once went with me to Dobbiehanes—it was after Frank was married—and she remarked to me, ‘ Jane, I hope your cousin won’t ruin himself in coals. I’ve heard of a man *burning* a hole in his pockets.’ She used to say such clever things, Miss Davie. She was a mother to me—all the mother I ever knew ; and say, that if you forget anything I mind it, and that” —

“ Really, Miss Dobbie, you must write yourself ; you have enough to fill a letter.”

“ No, my dear ; I used to be a good correspondent, but I must have fallen off very much, for few people write to me now.”

According to her grandmamma’s wish Bessie wrote as follows :—

Berwick St., Ironburgh, December 18—.

My right trusty and well-beloved Aunt Bar.—
We got yours, and are glad to know of your safety and Miss Boston’s betterness—that’s good English is it ? Miss Dobbie hasn’t got her Christmas invitation yet ; it will be a shame if it doesn’t come. We mind everything between us, I think, her and me. And

now I'll tell you a secret—and you mustn't be angry. When I was at Mrs. Dods' yesterday forenoon, Mr. Dods said if I liked he would take me to a reading in the evening—he and I had been speaking of readings, and concerts, and things. It began at eight, and would be over by half-past nine, and he would take me to the reserved seats; but he asked me not to mention it, as Mrs. Dods thought anything of that kind a throwing away of money. So I didn't mention it. I was very anxious to go, and we went, and I enjoyed it—that is, I didn't enjoy it, for I never care for being read to; but I enjoyed it because I thought I could have done it better myself. It was a lady who read—a lady in black satin and white gloves, with her hair done up to a pitch. Well, she read 'Eugene Aram's Dream,' and the 'Haunted House,' and I really *felt* I could have done it better. Mr. Dods said she had fine elocution; but if yon's elocution, I would like less of it and more feeling. The difficulty would be to read easily and well, and yet to let everybody hear; but of course practice would do it. I was trying it this morning; and though the doors were shut, and Katy was breaking up the

gathering-coal, she heard me and came running to see what had happened. She got a fright when she saw me in my night-gown standing in bed and holding forth. You must think of it; I'm sure I could do it—and teaching needs the patience of Job, which I have not. It seems funny to me how so many people turn out to hear things read to them that they could easily read to themselves; but *de gustibus non est*, etc., as your friend the Rev. P. P. might say. I got Miss Dobbie to buy a front yesterday—her hair is so thin—and they are not so dear as I thought. But it is not the improvement I thought either—the thick glossy hair with the white regular division over the little withered rosy-apple-looking face. Well, it can't be helped now, and I did it for the best. She says it will be so long before she can afford another that she must take great care of it, and she sits with a folded handkerchief tied over it to keep the division from dust, etc. I can't help laughing, which is a shame. Grandmamma is in her usual. The Rev. P. P. has not returned yet. Kate broke her wash-hand basin the day you left, and Grandmamma has bought another, but so small that she will need to pare her

face before using it. The seven golden candlesticks, next door, were as bright as ever yesterday. Dear aunt, have I made many mistakes? Please, don't send this back corrected; I know it would be for my good, but don't, there's a good auntie.—I am ever your own

B. B."

CHAPTER VII.

DR. M'VICAR was a physician of the old school. He had very considerable private means, was neat and punctilious in dress and equipage, and, above all, believed in medicine—believed in doses so fearfully nauseous, that I daresay the like of them were never compounded outside a witch's cauldron. He had been bred when the lancet was in its glory, had seen the blood of his patients spurt to the roof, which it is said the blood of patients won't do in these degenerate days; and he bled in inflammation still, let the new school say as it liked. Still no patient, gasping for health and trespassing after strange medical gods, ever mentioned a theory or mode of treatment to the doctor that he was not thoroughly familiar with and patted patronisingly on the back; he was open to conviction, took the grains of truth that lurked even in foolish and erroneous systems, smoothed his pa-

tient's doubts as to his own infallibility, and left him ashamed that he had ever presumed to doubt it, and convinced that if it was in human power to save him, Dr. M'Vicar was the man to do it.

This with the ordinary class of his patients, but Miss Boston was not of the ordinary class. He had known her for many years, but she had never been his patient before, and she had not sent for him now; he had called accidentally when she had begun to think of sending for him, but she did not tell him that. She had small faith in doctors, only when people are very ill what can they do but send for one? However, she argued, he was an old man, and had seen a great deal of disease, and must know something about it if he had ordinary sense and observation.

When Dr. M'Vicar went home from Blindpits, and had got into his slippers and easy chair, he told his family that the person Miss Boston sent for by his advice had arrived.

"Indeed," said Mrs. Gascoigne, the Doctor's sister; "she has not been long."

"I'm glad of it," said Mary, the only child of the

house; "I always pity an old person left to the care of a servant."

"It's Miss Boston's own blame," said Mrs. Gascoigne; "often and often I've advised her to get a companion; many a poor lady would be glad of the situation; but she's a positive old body, and will only do as she likes."

"The poor lady would have a precious time of it," said Mary.

"What sort of person is this, Doctor, that she has got at last?"

"Sensible, I think; she comprehended my directions readily enough; under the middle size rather, and greasy-looking, something like a gentleman's housekeeper, or the matron of a hospital perhaps."

"Is she a housekeeper or a matron?"

"No; I don't suppose it, but she may be; her mother is a cousin of Miss Boston's and also of the Grants."

"The Grants! I never heard them mention a cousin of that name."

"No; people are not in the habit of speaking of cousins who keep mangles or something of that sort."

"Keeps a mangle!" said Mrs. Gascoigne; "no wonder than she arrived in a hurry; she'll set herself to cook the old lady and cut the Grants out, who knows."

"The Grants won't care, I am sure," said Mary.

"Won't they?" said Mrs. Gascoigne.

"I hope so," said the doctor; "for they'll have me to blame for sending for this Miss Barclay; but if she does get a thousand or two she'll be the better for it, and they won't miss it much."

"I hope, Doctor, you mayn't live to repent the plan; it may be benevolent, but it's what I call rash," said his sister.

"People never regret benevolence, aunt."

"If Mary doesn't regret my benevolence, I'm sure I needn't."

"Papa!" cried Mary.

"Your papa is quite right, Mary; John Grant is not the man to relish an inheritance being unnecessarily divided."

"Papa and you never do justice to John Grant," and Mary left the room.

"Love is blind, you know, Robina," said the doctor

"It never made me blind, John."

"I can believe it, Robina."

"But if people choose to shut their eyes, that's a different thing."

"It comes to the same thing if they can manage to keep them shut; but the mischief is, they can't do that."

"They can affect to do it though. I've known women do that who saw as well as I do."

"John may be a little fond of money," said the doctor musingly, "but I don't think he will be a bad husband."

"Certainly not," said the widow; "he will be a very good husband, don't fear."

Mrs. Gascoigne,—who walked in all weathers,—and Mary M'Vicar, put on their goloshes next forenoon and proceeded through the snow to Blindpits to ask for Miss Boston, the doctor's sister intending to encourage, and advise, and generally patronise Miss Barclay, if on sight she should be thought worthy of such encouragement and patronage. With the creak of the supposed mangle in their ears, the ladies were somewhat taken aback when Miss Barclay made her

appearance. The doctor and his sister had a sliding scale of manners adapted to all ranks and classes, and Mrs. Gascoigne, having arranged her programme to suit an intelligent member of what she called the "lower orders," was not prepared to meet Miss Barclay as an equal. Barbara's manner, though stiff and roundabout to strangers, was perfectly self-possessed, so that when her visitor found her not overwhelmed by the occasion, and had investigated a brooch she wore and determined it was a thing of price, the old fashion of which pointed back to one or two ancestresses, she concluded it would hardly do to question her in a confidential way as to her mother's means and her own prospects.

"And you live in Ironburgh?" said Mrs. Gascoigne, after the introduction and Miss Boston's health had been got over.

"Yes, I live in Ironburgh."

"I know a little of it myself. I have various friends who live in the west end of Ironburgh. What part of the town do you stay in—what street?"

"Berwick Street," said Barbara promptly.



"I don't know that street—probably a new one; I am told Ironburgh increases very rapidly."

"Yes, it does; but Berwick Street is at least thirty years old, I should think."

"I thought it might be one of the new streets in the west end," said Mrs. Gascoigne.

"No, it is in the east end," said Barbara boldly.

"The country must appear very bleak to you accustomed to the town in winter," said Mary M'Vicar, anxious to stop her aunt's soundings, "and very cold."

"Yes, I have found it cold; a house standing alone is so different from our small flat in Berwick Street."

Mrs. Gascoigne was thrown out. How an individual of Miss Barclay's appearance and manners should voluntarily and promptly, and with no apparent end in view, confess that she lived, moved, and had her being in a small flat in the east end of Ironburgh, puzzled her.

Mrs. Gascoigne may have had her wrestling-matches with poverty; she may have lived in the haunts of the plebs; there may have been such

damaging facts in her history; and it may be true that at that moment her annual income was *nil*, save as it came out of her brother's pocket; but all these facts were kept in rigorous imprisonment. Even her niece did not know these little things; but then she had not been much beside her till of late. She only knew her as the Aunt Gascoigne to whom every one who had the privilege of her acquaintance ran for advice and sympathy; who never went a voyage in which the chief passengers in the vessel did not try to grapple her to their party with hooks of steel, or pay a visit to a family in which she did not become the prop of the old and the idol of the young members of it, and in which all, young and old, did not exhibit intense anxiety to win her consent to remain *en permanence*. That was a deeply-affecting chapter of her history, too, in which she lost her young husband in the first year of their marriage, which always concluded with the declaration that all the principal people of the neighbourhood, including some gentlemen of title, attended the funeral, and condoled personally, or by note, with the young widow. Mary M'Vicar never understood how this consoled her aunt.



“And, my dear, I have never been able to think of marrying again—never.”

Mary could sympathise with that tribute to the memory of her deceased uncle, although she never thought of that young hero as an elderly uncle. A lieutenant he had been in an infantry regiment, whose portrait, smiling in the heyday of youth, she had wept over. He was far nearer her than he was near the woman he had married a score of years ago,—who had been tossed about the world since, fighting for her own hand, till on the death of his wife her brother asked her to come to him. When there was no one present she could look at that portrait without a tear or a sigh. When there's no one by, what is the use of letting our feelings get the better of us? It only tends to wrinkles and a grim expression. But she was not a heartless woman either.

“Yes,” said Mrs. Gascoigne, “you'll feel it cold here; I do. I often think of going to Florence or Naples for the spring months; I have old friends in both places who would only be too glad to have me, but I can't think of leaving my brother and Mary

here ; but you'll not be long of getting accustomed to the cold, and you'll find it bracing."

"My stay will be so short that I'll hardly get accustomed to it, but I don't feel it very much."

"Oh, we were in hopes you had come to stay a long time," said Mrs. Gascoigne.

"If I were to consult my own inclination I would stay, but I have engagements that make it imperative I should go home in a fortnight."

"What will become of poor Miss Boston?" said Mary.

"I have great hopes she will be in her usual by that time, and not require me."

"It must be dismal work staying with her," said Mrs. Gascoigne ; "I don't think I could do it for all her money twice told, but I like to know that she is looked after."

Barbara coloured. "Miss Boston is a very old friend of mine ; it gives me great pleasure to be of service to her, but I have no doubt she would get a very good nurse for ten shillings a-week."

"I've said that scores of times—scores of times," repeated Mrs. Gascoigne, with energy ; "many a

respectable lady even would be glad of such a situation ; and I advise you, Miss Barclay, not to wear out your health and spirits by continuing such a strain upon them."

"I would never think of myself ; if it were in my power to stay, I would be only too glad," said Barbara, simply.

"You are very good," said Mrs. Gascoigne, unable to suppress a slight emphasis on her words, and rising to leave. As Mary M'Vicar shook hands with Barbara, she said, "Do come to us any time you feel dull, I shall be so glad to see you."

"Mary, my dear," said her aunt, when they were outside Miss Boston's gate, "I think it would be as well to wait till you know more about people before you issue invitations."

"Why? We see that Miss Barclay is a lady, and we know she's a cousin of the Grants, and I waited till I saw whether you would do it."

"But, my dear, you might know that when I do a thing, or when I don't do it, I have reasons. Miss Barclay may be, I don't doubt is, a very excellent, respectable person, but it is quite time enough yet

to ask her to our house. Who is that ? ” she asked, as she lifted up her eyes and beheld a man on horseback approaching.

“ It’s old Mr. Grant, aunt.”

“ *Old* Mr. Grant, indeed ! ” said Mrs. Gascoigne, “ Why, how old do you take him to be ? Very little more than forty, if so much, and I don’t call that old.”

“ Well, well ; it distinguishes him from his son. I call him young Mr. Grant.”

When Mr. Grant was near enough to see who the ladies were, he got off his horse to speak to them ; and certainly, standing there among the snow like a colossus of health and strength, the adjective old did not seem very descriptive of him. Mrs. Gascoigne—and she may be presumed to be a judge—called Mr. Grant a gentleman ; her brother called him a fine fellow ; Lord Heatherdale had been heard to say that he did not know what he should do without Grant ; and Miss Boston—Miss Boston whose opinion might be worth much—allowed that there were worse people in the world than James Grant. Mary M’Vicar liked him well ; and there were not wanting ladies in the



district who thought his high forehead, keen grey eyes, and aquiline nose—in short, his whole face and person—quite a type of manly beauty. As for age, Mr. Grant was younger than his own son. Young Mr. Grant knew most things, and was very seldom astonished; now Mr. Grant senior could go to see a panorama and come away delighted, thinking it the finest sight possible, and innocent enough to say so. If, as is likely, there were sharp business men—men of affairs—among the Greeks and Trojans, as distinguished from the warriors, pure and simple, then Mr. Grant senior was a lingering type of these men. He was Homeric in his healthy, breezy freshness, mingled with a dash of Laertes' son for wiles renowned.

“And you've been at Blindpits? How is Miss Boston to-day?”

Mrs. Gascoigne shook her head, then said briskly, “Do you know, Mr. Grant, there's a Miss Barclay there—a Miss Barclay from Ironburgh. The doctor says she's a cousin of yours; do you know anything of her?”

“Not a cousin of mine. Her mother was a cousin

of Mrs. Grant's. No; I don't know her. She had several brothers; I knew them pretty well, but they are dead years ago."

"Well; you'll find her there if you mean to call. She says she is not going to stay long, but we'll see," said Mrs. Gascoigne, significantly.

"But," said Mary, "she says she's an old friend of Miss Boston's, and I can fancy her paying a visit from pure kindness, without thinking of money."

"To be sure, Mary, so can we all; but your aunt likes to look very knowing sometimes. Isn't that true, Mrs. Gascoigne?"

"People are not always aware of their own weakness, Mr. Grant. I suppose you are on your way to Blindpits?"

"Yes. You know I am an old friend of Miss Boston's too, and I like to have a talk with her."

"You'll not likely see her to-day, however; but there will be no harm in calling."

"Harm? I hope not, Mrs. Gascoigne. One never can go far wrong in paying a little attention to a fellow-creature, especially in distress," and he passed on smiling.

Miss Boston's single male inmate seemed endowed with a kind of instinct respecting the senior Mr. Grant's visits to Blindpits, for he was always on the spot without an instant's delay, to hold his horse, or take it to the stable as directed. The explanation was, he drew what was to him a large annual revenue in shillings and sixpences from Mr. Grant. Mr. Grant, in point of age, had twenty-one years the advantage of his son ; but, as I have hinted already, the young head stood on his shoulders, and the old on the shoulders of his offspring. When Mr. Grant junior arrived at Blindpits, he had to whistle and knock and halloo, and often did all three in vain so far as attendance went ; for even Miss Boston, aware of the hubbub, would connive with her rustic hobble-dehoy, and let the gentleman look after his horse himself,—and chuckle over it. He was not given to rash generosity : he paid all his legal debts punctually ; and where a largess was boldly claimed he had been known to give it, but whenever he could legally save a sixpence in a quiet way, that sixpence he saved.

Miss Boston awoke—awoke from her long tran-

quail sleep, with a pang, I shouldn't wonder—to find herself once more born into a world which to her was bleak and dreary. But weak as she was in body, she clutched her strength of mind to her. When told that Mr. Grant was in the house, she said,

“Barbara, gang down and tell him I'm a heap better; he'll be glad to hear it. But say I canna see him the day, I'm no able to see ony body yet.”

Barbara had never seen Mr. Grant. He had come to this part of the country after her visits to it had ceased; but as she entered the room where he was, she remembered that this was the man her brothers had pestered, and her mother had begged from, and as she walked up to him, wounded pride dyed her face with blushes. Possibly he guessed her thoughts. He looked at her as she gave him Miss Boston's message and said to himself, “Poor thing, she must have had a hard struggle, and with such a mother too, and she has not sunk but floated. What a shame! I never asked if I could help her.” He felt as if he should have blushed also, but though sins of omission may be as heinous as sins of commission, people don't so readily blush for them.



“And you think Miss Boston is really better. I’m truly glad to hear it. The sight of you must have worked like a charm. I hope you will stay as long as possible with her.”

“Yes,” she said, shortly, and she did not ask him to sit down, nor did she take a seat herself. She had not allowed herself to be run away with by what she considered her mother’s prejudiced opinions; but evidently Mr. Grant was a familiar friend of Miss Boston’s. His late wife, whom she remembered well—she was a very frequent visitor in her father’s house before the evil days came—his late wife and her own mother were Miss Boston’s nearest, if not only, relatives. Could her mother’s opinion be the correct one, and was he trying to grasp the whole inheritance? If so, then, poor as she was, Barbara felt that she could afford to despise him—to despise him thoroughly. But then Mr. Grant looked very far from despicable. The expression of his good-looking face was anything but that of a man who would do the meanest of all mean actions—take advantage of a fellow creature’s weakness for his own ends—and his manner was kind and cordial; but many wolves range the earth in sheep’s clothing.

"It's a long time since you have been in this part of the country, I believe," said he.

"A very long time, indeed," replied Barbara.

"It will be almost strange to you then. You must come to Grantsburn some day. My sister will drive over for you."

"Thank you; I don't mean to visit while I am here."

"Oh, we'll see about that," and Mr. Grant went away.

Barbara went to the window and watched him ride off. She was rather ashamed of herself on reflection. "After all," thought she, "he may as well accuse me of coming here for my own ends, as I him. I wonder if I'm beginning to lust after money. I will put Miss Boston's money, at least, out of my mind altogether—imagine she is a poor body: it won't be difficult to do in this house," and she looked round the room, turned from the window, and sighed, a very unusual manifestation of feeling for her: her mother took that department, and needed no assistance.

The servant chanced to come into the room, and

Barbara said to her, "Does Miss Boston not like her grates kept brighter, Bell?"

"Ye may say that, mem: the hale house wad need paperin' an' pentin' to mak' it look decent, but she'll no hear tell o't; ony kind o' cleanin' just puts her in a frenzy."

"Indeed! she must be greatly changed; everything used to be clean and nice."

"Weel, I couldna say; this is only my third half-year."

"As Miss Boston is upstairs, it can hardly disturb her to clean that grate; it is like a grate in a roadside public-house. Get it polished a little, if you please."

"Weel, weel," muttered Bell. "I wonder how lang that woman's gaun to bide," she said to her fellow-servant in the kitchen, "interfering wi' things; if she's to bide lang I'll no bide lang—twa mistresses is rather ower muckle o' a guid thing."

"Weel, ye'll see how ye'll like twa mistresses; ye dinna think it's ower mony for me."

"Twice twa wadna be ower mony for you, if they could put mettle in yer heels; my man, ye'll gang a gey twa-three places or ye get a better ane than this,

naething ado but sit at the lug o' the fire an' tak yer meat."

"An' I'm thinking it's no ilka place either that ye'll get in Geordie Bogle maist ilka night, and get ham an' eggs fried to his supper."

"Geordie Bogle! Ham an' eggs!" said Bell, in rapt surprise; "the laddie's in a creel."

"Ay, but neither my lugs nor my nose is in a creel. I kenned I wasna fleeced awa' to my bed at eight o'clock for naething. An' there's no a hen layin',—nae wonder an egg couldna be gotten for the leddy's breakfast."

"Ye young limb, do ye mean to insinuate that I tak the eggs?"

"No, I dinna. I ken ye tak them, and them twentypence the dizen the now too."

"Davie, my man, it's a pity but yer feet was as smart as yer fancy. Geordie Bogle cam in wi' a letter the ither night he had gotten at the post, and the mistress wanted an egg an' a morsel o' ham that night I mind. Ye had better tak' care how ye raise stories—I've kenned folk putten in the jail for less." Davie was staggered by the explanation and the implied threat, but he was far from convinced.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE people of the district had settled Miss Boston's speedy demise as a certain event—it is so easy for the general public to make up its mind to a thing of that kind—and Dr. M'Vicar had shaken his head repeatedly and said, “At her time of life, you know, at her time of life.”

But the point on which the public centred its interest was, How was her money left? Some people, whose words were sharper than their thoughts were original, remarked that it wouldn't be left at all if she could take it with her; but this view of the case was not enlarged on, as it could serve no practical end—she couldn't take it with her. To whom would it be left then? If this Miss Barclay, it was said, had arrived in time she might have made a good thing of it; but it was hardly likely the old lady would alter her will now. Would Mr. Grant

get it all? When asked that question, Mr. Grant only smiled, and said that he knew nothing about it; but that was supposed by many to be a subterfuge, —his smile and his words contradicted each other.

Would it go to an hospital, or be divided among public charities, or be left to build a church to be called the Boston Church—a scheme which has been many times hit upon as combining an earthly memory with a heavenly deed?

It was not written that the public mind was to be set at rest on these points at this time, for, contrary to all expectation, Miss Boston recovered rapidly. First, she sat up in bed, then she got out of bed and sat by her chamber-fire, next she went downstairs in the afternoon, and finally she arrived to join Barbara at breakfast. It would have been better if she had taken these steps more gradually, but she belonged to an old-fashioned, non-indulgent generation, and would not lie in bed if able to crawl out of it.

Although she had always been accustomed to depend entirely on herself, and would not suffer herself to suppose she needed help, she enjoyed Barbara's kindly ministrations, quick comprehension



of the mysteries of her toilet, and deft assistance. When the awkwardness of drawing together again after so long an interval, was over, they got on very well.

"I can do wi' you, Barbara," Miss Boston said. "I can do fine wi' you—that Mrs. Gascoigne has deaved me on the deafest side o' my head to get what she ca's a companion, as if I was gaun to put up wi' ony stranger stappit in on me. Na, na, there's nae forlorn creature comin' here, because she can do nae better, to put up wi' my humours, an' mak' me vexed every time I spoke aboon my breath, although I'm no sae able to do that as I have been."

"Would it not be possible, Miss Boston, to get a better servant? I doubt Bell's is only eye-service."

"Eye-service!" said Miss Boston, her voice rising, "it's no that length. I can see dirt weel aneuch, but I'm no able to contend wi' her."

"But surely there's no need of contending; a woman might be got who would do her work quietly and comfortably."

"Maybe. I had ane that was wi' me fifteen years, and she wad hae been here yet if she hadna

ta'en't into her head, like a gowk, to marry a common working man wi' seven sons."

"Most extraordinary—the woman must have been crazy," said Barbara, who had a judicious horror of a woman landing herself in a conjugal mess.

"Ye may say sae ; an' I tell'd her if she liket to bide I wad never see her at a loss ; but ye see, even servant women, it seems, canna live on bread and butter its lane ; she's maybe rued it whiles, but she's done a duty by the man an' his bairns—that callant Davie is the second o' them I've had. I like to tak' a muckle hungry laddie for twa-three year an' fill him up wi' gude meat ; he'll be mair a man a' his days for't. It's maybe a humble line o' usefulness, but I'm equal till't, which I canna say o' a' the women's wark I hear about now-a-days. Weel, since Davie's stepmother was bewitched, I havena fa'en in wi' her marrow, an' I'm sure I hate changes."

"They are not pleasant, certainly."

"And do ye no think the house might be improved—new windows built out, an' hae't a' papered and painted ? Mrs. Gascoigne says I should do that."

"There's a good deal of discomfort connected

with building, unless you could leave the house for a time, which you might not care for doing ; but I think if you were to paper and paint the rooms you use they would look more cheerful, and it would not cost much," Barbara said, naturally ; for cost was always her first consideration in any little improvement she planned at home.

" Cost !" said Miss Boston, " it's no the cost I mind ; but what does it signify whether a body steps out o' a glaur dub, or off a marble stane, into the next world ?"

Barbara, who was not quick in her ideas, was meditating her answer to Miss Boston's very peculiar language, as she considered it, when Bell came in to lay the cloth for dinner, and her mistress followed her nimble movements constantly with her eyes.

" Bell," she said, suddenly, " I heard a hen laying the day before I came down the stair."

" They're maybe gaun to begin now," said Bell.

" They never gi'ed ower a'thegither," said Miss Boston.

" Then what cam' o' the eggs, mem ?"

" Ay, what cam' o' them, say ye ?"

“Miss Boston ! ye dinna mean to say that I made away wi’ the eggs ?”

“Whatever I meant, I asked what cam’ o’ them ; ye needna threep to me that there were nane laid,” said Miss Boston, the paternal temper glowing from its embers once more, flushing her thin face, and elevating her treble tones ; “ an’ ye’ll see that there’s eggs, or an egg, forthcomin’ the morn’s morning at your peril.”

“At my peril ! my certy, what peril will I be in, I wad like to ken ?”

“I’ll hae ye ta’en up for a thief, ye brazen-faced hizzy that ye are,” and Miss Boston nearly squealed in her rising excitement.

“Oh, stop, Miss Boston !” cried Barbara, shocked at the scene ; “it is possible enough the hens may not have been laying.”

“But it’s no possible,” cried Miss Boston, as if she was shouting to a deaf person, “as many hens fed as they are, or ought to be, and in a warm house ; it’s no possible, and it never happened before.”

Bell had left the room, and she came back with an egg in her hand, and going up to Miss Boston, said,

“There’s yer egg, mem, an’ I wad advise ye to tak’ care o’t; where could ye put it to be safest, do ye think?” Instantaneously the egg was dashed in the woman’s face, and she turned and ran to the kitchen smarting under the sudden blow.

Barbara said nothing, but Miss Boston rose and said, “We’ll have dinner now.” It was on the table, and they took their places. Miss Boston said, “Will you ask a blessing, Barbara?” Barbara went through a form, but all her sense of propriety was so outraged that she hardly knew what she said, and not another word was spoken during the meal, nor was the scene alluded to by either afterwards. No doubt Miss Boston was ashamed of it, and she suffered for it in the flesh also, for she was sensibly the worse of the agitation.

In the afternoon, to the relief of both ladies, two old friends of Miss Boston’s called—Misses Stark from Heatherburgh. Their appearance belied their name, for they were little frail-looking creatures, dressed in mourning which appeared to have been all in the dyer’s vat since it was new, but they carried themselves with some dignity.

None of Miss Boston's friends could be accused of consciously toadying her, but it is to be presumed that had she been in a dependent position, or even if she had existed on a slender annuity, the charms of her society would hardly have sufficed to bring the people about her that were in the habit of visiting at Blindpits. Even unconsciously they toadied her very little, considering she was a solitary woman undoubtedly wealthy, and it is a pleasant fact to have to record. Still Dr. M'Vicar patiently overlooked her outspoken opinions regarding himself and his profession, and was very attentive; and his sister, Mrs. Gascoigne, who declared she "enjoyed character" so much, would hardly have scaled a stair to behold it developed on the pauper's allowance of two shillings a-week. Even Mr. Grant, it is to be feared, might have forgotten the fact that Miss Boston was his deceased wife's cousin; it is quite certain his son would; but Mary M'Vicar would have looked in on the poor old woman sometimes with a dainty offering in her hand.

The Misses Stark mixed only with the best society of the place, and they had long had the entry of Blindpits, and not every one had that. Miss Boston



had satisfaction in saying that there were people in the district who had never been within her door and never would, and saying it in a way that implied she knew their anxiety to be on visiting terms with her. The Misses Stark, not having much to do at home, often stayed for weeks at Blindpits, and they had put up with much, with a great deal which they might not have overlooked had their hostess been as poor as themselves; but even they did not act from interested motives altogether, they had not the energy to plan and carry out a sustained attack on Miss Boston's money. If either of them had possessed the ability to take Miss Boston and all her concerns in hand, that lady would probably have submitted, in consideration that she was approaching the time when the grasshopper becomes a burden; but they were feeble, and Miss Boston despised feebleness in all its branches: it set her on edge, and not the less so that she had begun to experience it in her own person. But the Misses Stark were good little women, and she had a regard for them, and in her turn "enjoyed character" in them.

They sat all the afternoon and evening, and buzzed

on like bees, sometimes in concert and sometimes separately. Miss Jane being engaged on one side of the table giving Miss Boston what news she had been able to muster, Miss Ann devoted herself to Barbara on the other side, and gave her a detail of all the more outstanding illnesses that had been in the Stark family, since it had been a family, down to her own last attack of bronchitis. Barbara listened attentively; it did not occur to her to feel bored—was it not the kind of lore with which her own memory was furnished?

But the Misses Stark set themselves to do good after their ability; virtue did not go out of them, which is surely the very highest style of doing good, as well as the most telling, but it was jerked out of them according to their lights. Miss Jane, who had a shade more *vis* than her sister, had blown many little sermons to Miss Boston by a side-wind; for a measure of pawkiness is not inconsistent either with feebleness or virtue—at least they are to be found side by side often enough. To-night, having an end in view, she chose for her text the responsibility connected with money.

“I think,” she said, “rich people should use their

money according to their station, not abusing it; and give the surplus to charitable and benevolent purposes."

"I'm o' your mind there, Jean," said Miss Boston; "it's a stupid thing hoarding siller just to set a pack o' greedy folk quarrelling ower it afore you're weel cauld in yer grave, but rich folk canna whiles see that."

"It is surprising," said Ann; "if I were rich, oh what a luxury it would be to me to give—to give largely, freely."

"Ay," said Miss Boston, "it's a luxury that the likes o' us puir bodies whiles crave after; but rich folk hae so many luxuries that this ane finks out o' sight amang them gey an' aften."

"They are the more to be pitied," said Miss Jane; "it often consoles me in my poverty that I haven't the tremendous responsibility of riches on my shoulders."

"It's a mercy, Jean, that nane o' us need lie waken at night, thinking what we should do wi' our hoards."

"Oh," said Miss Jane, "it is not that I would be

at any loss what to do with money, if I had it. I would make conscience of apportioning my income, so much to live on, so much for future provision, and the rest to be spent for the good of my fellow-creatures. I think I could manage it, nicely, in some such way as that."

"Then, if ony body were to leave ye a fortune, Jean, ye wadna get sic a gliff after a'."

"It would be my earnest endeavour to make a good use of it; and, by the way, Ann and I are collecting for a very excellent object just now. If I had plenty of money, I would give to it pretty liberally. You'll give us a subscription I'm sure, Miss Boston. We have never applied to you in vain yet."

"I'll see. What is't ye're collecting for? You'll hae your book?"

Miss Ann produced her collecting-book, and Miss Boston put on her spectacles and read, "Subscription towards the support of a Reader for the Ignorant Men's Association Meetings." "A reader! What's that?" asked she.

"A person to read to them—to read aloud, you know, Miss Boston, at their meetings."

“Can nane o’ them read? Ye should get a schulemaister. But if it’s just somebody to read ye want, I’ll gie ye a gude subscription—I’ll send ye my laddie to read to them, he’s a gude reader. I hear him read a chapter every night and a prayer. You heard him, Barbara; do you think he wad do?”

“He reads very tolerably for his age and station,” said Barbara, shortly. She had heard him read a prayer in which the royal family, the statesmen at the helm of affairs, the two houses of parliament, our armies by sea and land, and the children of this household, were all remembered in a row; and she had listened to the reader’s sing-song tones without a smile, although it did strike her that some of the petitions were not apposite to the circumstances.

“You know, Miss Boston,” said Miss Jane, “it is a man of some intelligence that is required, who could throw in a word of explanation as he deemed it advisable. He is not required to select the works he reads, the committee do that.”

“Then ye think Davie wadna do? Let me see what other folk gie, then.”

“With pleasure,” said Miss Jane; “but other

people are not to be our rule. We are to give as we have prospered."

"I've heard that," said Miss Boston; "'James Grant, £1'—weel done, James! I can do nothing like that, and really I canna see it's a very crying case. If the men are ignorant an' ken't, they're no far ahint; they'll no be lang ignorant if they're worth a preen."

"Ah! but who knows his own ignorance?" asked Miss Ann.

"They know it," rejoined Miss Boston; "so I think they're ower wise to need siller gathered for them. They ca' themselves the Ignorant Men's Association."

"But they didn't give the association that name; the committee of the society did that," explained Miss Ann.

"And do ony men gang to the meetings?" asked Miss Boston.

"Yes; a considerable number."

"They maun be a wheen gude-natured sumphs," said Miss Boston, with animation; "they deserve some bawbees. Barbara, ye see better than me; there's an inkstand in the table-drawer, take a pen and put down my name for half-a-crown; it's mair

than I intended to gie, but they deserve encouragement."

The amount of the subscription was of course no surprise to the Misses Stark; from experience they had ceased to expect the day of great things at Blindpits, but Barbara was struck with it as she marked it down. But she was struck with Miss Boston and all about her. She had expected that this visit would dovetail naturally into her last, and instead of that she found a great gulf.

The truth is, it is no mean part of the happiness of childhood and youth that the eyes are holden that they cannot see. An ugly face is not ugly to a child, and a girl, unless she be fatally precocious, does not see all even of what passes before her, far less can she suspect what she does not see. A person who is a shade more than ordinarily kind to a child may reckon upon being canonised, especially if, in after life, cares be many and friends be few. Barbara's memory had thrown a halo round Blindpits and its mistress, which had evaporated like mist on coming in contact with them now—surely it was another house, another hostess, and another guest.

At the primitive hour of nine, the Misses Stark's servant arrived to take them home. They had always very young servants, and were marvellously fortunate in getting a succession of girls who made no difficulty of conforming to the rather stringent regulations of Ashburn Cottage,—girls who made their work their pleasure, who would sit whole evenings alone, knitting or sewing, or reading any good profitable volume the Misses Stark might select for their perusal, and who rarely asked out except once a quarter or so, to take tea with, say—their grandmothers. The ladies heartily believed in this pattern girl. Before her mistresses were ready to start she had a precious half-hour of social intercourse with Bell, heard the story of the egg with embellishments (it hardly needed any), and exchanged a few sheep-eye glances with the rustic groom of the chambers; indeed, that youth, knowing the habits of the ladies when they arrived at Blindpits, walked away to Ashburn Cottage, spent the evening with the solitary hermit there, and escorted her in the moonlight to attend her mistresses. And there was nothing very depraved in

this after all ; but the Misses Stark were not capable of imagining their handmaid guilty of it, and kept their faith in a creature—a kind of cross between a donkey and an angel.

CHAPTER IX.

MISS BOSTON went to bed rather exhausted with her day's work. When she was comfortably settled she said, "Barbara, go downstairs,"—Barbara at once thought she was going to send her to give Bell her dismissal,—“go down the stair and bring up my spectacles, or they'll be broken in the morning maybe.” Barbara went, and seeing the water-bottle empty, took it to get it filled. She walked into the kitchen, not thinking any harm of entering Bell's domain. When she opened the door, however, she stopped—a man was sitting at the table opposite Bell,—his back was towards her. Bell started up and asked what she wanted; the man turned round with a look of eager curiosity, and Barbara could hardly believe her eyes. “Mr. Pett-i-grew!” she exclaimed.

“Miss Barclay!” he stammered.

"I certainly did not anticipate seeing you here, Mr. Pettigrew."

"Bell, here," and he looked in her direction, "is a cousin of mine, and when I'm in this part of the country I call on her."

"Oh, indeed! and when did you leave Berwick Street?"

"I haven't been there since I saw you. I've been preaching, and the labourer is worthy of his hire, Miss Barclay."

"Certainly."

Bell was standing, open-mouthed, with the replenished bottle in her hand, smiling, ready to make a third in the conversation; which Barbara observing, did not approve of; so she took her bottle, and said, "Good night, Mr. Pettigrew," before he had got any one of the numerous questions put which were thronging to his tongue.

"Preserve me, Peter!" said his cousin, "how do ye ken her, and what is she?"

"I know her, Bell, as well as I do you, and she is a very worthy, respectable woman. I'll say that for her."



"They say she's some friend to the mistress, an she's come to look after the siller; if she gets a gude swatch o't she'll be worth looking after, Peter."

"Indeed!" said Peter; "no possible."

"Ay, but it is possible, though it may be a while yet. She's a teugh auld body the mistress; an' what a birse she has—she threw an egg right in my face this very day; I thocht I wad hae a blue ee."

"It was a pity to waste an egg," said the careful Peter; "the best are eighteenpence in Ironburgh the now."

"Ye'll no eat mony o' them at that, Peter, I'm thinkin'. Ye was aye a saving chap: how muckle hae ye laid by yet, I wonder?"

"Laid by! What can the like of me lay by? But your mistress, Bell; she'll have plenty of friends besides Miss Barclay?"

"No that come here."

"Ay; they don't come here, do they not? How long have you been here, Bell?"

"This is my third half-year, and I'm gaun to bide; it's no an ill place."

"That's right. Who of her friends do come?"

“ Weel, there’s Grant the factor and his son—he is a mean character ; he cam into this kitchen the other day, an’ askit me to clean his boots, an’ marched off, an’ a’ he said was ‘ Thank you ; ’ he’s ay like himsel’,—an’ twa-three mair.”

“ Who more, Bell ? ”

“ What the wiser wad ye be, Peter, if I tell’d ye ? ye dinna ken ony o’ them.”

Thus the door of information was suddenly slammed in Mr. Pettigrew’s face. Most people that had met Mr. Pettigrew oftener than once, exercised this bit of discipline upon him more or less politely ; still, the mass of information he managed to get from the good-natured and unwary, and the kind of it, was surprising.

“ But, Peter, you that’s aye sae gude at speerin’ questions, ye’ll can tell me about Miss Barclay. The doctor’s maid says her mother keeps a mangle.”

“ Ay ; does the doctor’s maid say she keeps a mangle ? How does she know ? ”

“ Weel, ye can gang an’ speer at her, Peter Pettigrew. Does she keep a mangle or no ? ”

“ Not that I know of ; and if she did, I think I would have come to the knowledge of it.”

“ Let ye alane, Peter.”

“ But they might be the better of some siller for all that. What will the old lady be worth, think you ?” and he put the question in an off-hand accidental way.

“ A power o’ siller. I’ll no gie’t a name.” And Mr. Pettigrew, finding that he was not likely to gain further intelligence, departed, leaving a message for Miss Barclay that he would call on her friends when he got home, and let them know of her welfare, as if Miss Barclay and he had met on the edge of the Mallee Scrub.

Barbara did not sleep much on her sofa that night, and once or twice in the course of it she heard Miss Boston give a deep sigh, followed by an “ Oh hone !” She made no sign of hearing, being aware that if Miss Boston had known she was awake she would not have permitted herself even this indulgence. Barbara pitied her old friend, but her feeling towards her was a little changed for the moment ; she had no sympathy with violent passion of any kind. She was accustomed to her mother’s querulous temper, and she could allow for the want of self-



control in childhood, but to see an aged person shaken by a gust of passion, appalled her. There was a minor point she did not like in Miss Boston—her liberal use of the broad mother-tongue. Bessie sometimes spoke it, and she reproved her by saying, that though she liked well enough to hear it from such persons as Mrs. Dods, she could not bear it in her. Barbara could not remember that Miss Boston used to speak Scotch, and perhaps she had not spoken it. She could speak English as well as most Scotch people, but Scotch was the language of her childhood, of the days when she had been happiest, and she had recurred to it almost entirely in her old age. However, it had been Barbara's business, for many years, to speak and write the English language with extreme propriety, and the native Doric, I am sorry to say, was offensive in her ear. She was self-denying, self-sacrificing, laborious, kindly, and judicious; and having such a constellation of virtues, I can afford to admit that she was somewhat narrow in her views of human nature.

Though her furlough was nearly out now, she had

not had the heart to broach the subject of her departure, and this irreparable breach between Miss Boston and her servant complicated the situation. That cause of care, however, she found she might have dismissed. After the scene of yesterday she had fully expected that the parties would separate with one consent; but, instead of that, neither made the slightest allusion to it, and seemed, if possible, on rather better terms than before. Barbara was not like the Stuarts, whom, it is said, that generally successful schoolmaster, Experience, never was able to teach anything; she gathered from this fact, which took her so much by surprise, that it would be the part of wisdom not to intermeddle with Miss Boston's arrangements.

"I wonder what's come o' James Grant all this time," said Miss Boston, "and his sister; she has not been here since you came, Barbara."

"Perhaps you didn't observe Miss Stark say she had been ill with cold?"

"They ken aye sae mony folk that's ill wi' ae thing or anither, that it's no easy keepin' sight o' them; to hear them, ye wad think there are aye mair

folk on the sick-list than off it; but they are gude bodies, an' to their credit never speak ill o' folk, but oh, it's wersh!"

"They seem, indeed, to be excellent ladies."

"Ye may weel say that; they're away some gate the day saying the same o' you; a'budy wi' them are excellent men and women. I dinna doubt they gang about plasterin' and whitewashin' me, although you, Barbara, might think it a difficult job."

"I'm sure they are sincere. I don't doubt love and respect for you bring them here."

"Do ye think so? Did love and respect bring you here, Barbara?"

"Yes," said Barbara, "they did."

Miss Boston was pleased—not visibly, however—she knew it was true. There was that about Barbara's efficient loving-kindness that made itself felt as genuine without needing to be told so; and she said, "I wish they may keep you here, but it's no easy driving oot o' the bluid what's bred in the bane."

Barbara understood this as an allusion to, or species of apology for, the exploit of yesterday, and she was touched that Miss Boston should apologise to her. That

tried hard to do what was right. She was saved the embarrassment of answering the implied confession by the entrance of Mr. Grant.

“What, Miss Boston ! not only up but down, I declare ; it is you who should be often ill, to set an example of getting quickly better,” exclaimed Mr. Grant.

“Ay, if folk have mair days to live, James, they’ll live them ye see.”

“So I see ; and that’s the view you take of Dr. M’Vicar’s skill and Miss Barclay’s care. Poor encouragement, Miss Barclay !” and he looked towards the window where Barbara was sitting.

“As for the doctor,” said Miss Boston, “he kens best himsel’ whether he’s worked a miracle or no. He aye says a gude nurse is worth half a doctor, but I think a gude nurse is worth half-a-dozen doctors ; and Barbara is a gude nurse—a better couldna be.”

“Oh, Miss Boston !” said Barbara, “I’m sure I

have done nothing for you but what any one would have done, except perhaps a pagan."

"Weel, there's plenty o' pagans in the country, then," rejoined Miss Boston.

"I knew you were better," said Mr. Grant, "but I didn't expect to find you down stairs. I met Miss Ann Stark, and she told me, but she had barely time to speak; she was on her way to the train, and was late. I don't think she could possibly catch it."

Miss Boston was amused. It was a point of "character" in the Misses Stark to be usually late at railway stations.

"She's accustomed to that," said Miss Boston, "and it wadna distress her; but, James, siller maun be turning plenty at Grantsburn."

"What evidence of that have you?"

"Or maybe Jean Stark has found out the way to get round ye."

"Oh, my subscription for the reader! Well, I think that a good object. At any rate, they can't do much mischief with twenty shillings."

"Do mischief! if that's a' ye ken about things, the sooner ye join the association the better. I'm

sure Jean Stark didna gie ye that for a rule o' liberality ; but I'll tell ye ae piece o' mischief it did—it made me gie half-a-crown."

"Well, if it doesn't do more, I'll not be very guilty. We're expecting Mrs. Richardson and Graham. They'll likely be over to see you, Miss Boston. Do you think you could venture as far as Grantsburn to see them?"

"Weel, James, I really dinna think I'm able, so ye'll excuse me."

"But you'll spare Miss Barclay to us? My sister is sorry, Miss Barclay, that she hasn't been able to call, but she'll send for you on Friday, if you'll come to us."

"Thank you," said Barbara; "but in Miss Boston's present state I would rather stay with her when my visit is to be so short."

"Nonsense!" said Miss Boston, "you'll be a gude bairn and gang. What's to make your visit so short?"

"I must go home. Perhaps at another time I may have the pleasure of going to Grantsburn."

"Mr. Grant is a rich man, is he not?" asked

Barbara of Miss Boston, when he had gone. "I have heard so, and that he drives a carriage and pair."

"He got a covered-in thing, and a pownie, to tak his sister to the kirk. Ye can ca't a carriage and pair if ye like ; and for being rich, it depends on what ye mean by rich. He has a gude yearly income, but he has had to help his brothers, and néarly to keep a widowed sister and her family ; but her ain have all died, and she has only a stepson now, Graham, that he spoke o'. But ye should hæ gane to Grantsburn, Barbara. It's a fine place, and ye never can tell where a blister'll light."

Barbara coloured. In the recesses of her proper governess soul she felt that Miss Boston was coarse. Miss Boston might be coarse, but she had stated a truth. Her own blister had been a very remarkable one. It was half-a-century since it had been rudely torn away. The flesh could not be very tender now, surely, but the memory of it even yet could send the blood creeping into her withered cheeks.

After the blister remark there was a long pause. Then Miss Boston said, "His marriage was anything but happy." She had a knack of resuming a subject

after it had been dropped and forgotten, as if there had been no interval.

“ Whose marriage ?” asked Barbara.

“ James Grant’s. It did not last long, and it was as weel, for the woman was a gowk ; but if there’s a gowk in a family, she’s aye first married.”

“ My mother and she were intimate, and she liked her.”

Miss Boston could hardly say to Barbara that she considered Mrs. Barclay such another ; and the topic was changed by Barbara explaining the necessity she was under of going home speedily. Then Miss Boston thought she was ill-used, and lost her temper ; and no more was said.

Barbara pitied Miss Boston, and loved her ; but in her own independent middle life she felt so able to stand alone that she did not comprehend the feebleness of age creeping on without a friendly arm to lean on, or the desolation of a person sitting in front of the grave without a gleam of close human sympathy ; or if she was aware of it in general, she did not attach the idea of weakness either of body, or at least of mind, to Miss Boston. Was it not the



constant effort of that lady to conceal all such weakness?

“ Besides,” thought Barbara, “ she is not such an object of pity after all. She will not be more solitary than she has been for years, and she is rich.”

Miss Barclay’s own worrying trials had arisen so much from want of money, that it was natural for her to think that where plenty of that was life must be much smoother sailing. However, she had no choice, she must go home and work for her household. And Miss Boston tried to think herself ill-used. She had made up her mind when she sent for Barbara that she would remain permanently; instead of which Miss Barclay had stayed a fortnight only, and was going away with no further explanation than that she must “ resume her teaching.” She gave no hint of difficulties or anxiety, nor even let fall a word betraying dissatisfaction with her lot. If she had, Miss Boston might have acted differently; as it was, pride stopped her from proposing any arrangement whereby she might have induced Barbara to stay—and she went.

CHAPTER X.

THE weather had been of the bleakest during Barbara's visit—alternate frost and thaw, with driving showers of sleet, but the sun shone on her departure. Snow to the depth of some inches had fallen during the night, more noiselessly than ever was the tread of list shoe; it had spread its pure beauty down to the very edge of the sea. Having its own way most places, perhaps it wondered why, with all its quiet persistency, it could not change the colour of that great Ethiopian of a sea. The air was perfectly still and clear, and the sun caused something like warmth, so like that by mid-day little columns of insects, made up mostly of wings and legs, hailing from they best knew where, danced by the side of Miss Boston's bushes. Was that mad dance the measure of their lives? and, having had their fling, were they content to die and be no more? or what became of them?



The blackbird hopping about might tell, if his golden beak could speak. Under the impression that insects and sunshine were going to be plentiful now, he has let loose a note, but only one; something told him he was premature.

It was partly Barbara's nature, it was wholly her habit, to think of others before herself. Had she considered her own comfort at this time, she would have left Blindpits in the morning, so as to have reached home before the close of the day; but she chose to travel after nightfall rather than break in on Miss Boston's usual habits. She had a tender heart, Barbara, and when she was helping her old friend to dress, she felt as if she were doing almost a guilty thing in leaving her.

Miss Boston did not say much, except a grim "Thank you" now and again; and she did not submit to being helped so graciously as she had done. She told Bell to have an early dinner ready for Miss Barclay, and then sat down on a chair and watched her putting her slender luggage together. She said suddenly, "When are you coming back again?"

"Dear Miss Boston, I would come very soon if it

depended only on myself; and I will come in summer if I can."

"Weel, come; if I'm livin' I'll be here, and if I'm no livin' ye'll likely hear tell o't."

"But you will write, Miss Boston—you'll surely write to me?"

"No, I never write; there's naebody livin' that I care for writin' to; and I havena written a letter for mony a day."

"But it will be cruel not to let me know how you are. Perhaps one of the Misses Stark would write for you?"

"Weel, we'll see. Ye may leave an envelope directed to yoursel', and I'll maybe manage to scrape a line."

After her guest went away, Miss Boston sat in her chair again, and looked long into the fire. What saw she there? We know what young dreamers see—but aged dreamers!—their castles have all fallen, ghosts flit in and out among the ruins; their journey is behind them, and they are nearing the last milestone. Happy they if at the end they shall find entrance into one of the many mansions!

Governesses are a numerous class as society is constituted. They may present picturesque points, and consequently have been often seized upon by the novelist, and rendered with good and striking effect. We have the unprincipled scheming governess ; the good, gentle, trampled-on governess ; the automaton governess ; the madly-impassioned ; the prim and frightfully proper ; the nobly ambitious ; and the governess who is strikingly clever and always mistress of the situation. Barbara was none of these ; neither was she a good woman of startling conversational powers, or an "awfu' gift o' the gab," as Miss Boston would have said. This was a comfort. It takes a man in robust health of body and mind, to stand unshaken the constant intelligent conversation of a lady, who speaks the English language with extreme propriety. Solomon, wide as his knowledge of society was, must have missed this type, or he would not have given the palm to her brawling sister. There may be variety in brawling, and in listening to it you can have a sense of being holier than she ; but the lady who won't take a short cut, who won't make a grammatical slip, but keeps on, with a six-governess



power of speaking with propriety, you know in your heart to be an estimable character, and yet flesh and blood can hardly stand her, and you feel yourself a double-dyed miscreant because you don't enjoy her society.

Barbara was simply a type, with modifications, of a great army of single women,—an army, but at war with nothing and nobody—not with their own lots or society, but able and willing to do their duty in the positions assigned to them;—women leading what appears a second-hand kind of life, but probably unconscious of it; of average abilities and education, but of sound vivid conscience, working as in the eye of the master, and willing to wait for their wages till the end of the day. Such was my heroine, for though you may not consider her to be so, when you come to the end of the story, she is my heroine, and I hereby throw down the glove, and defend her against all comers.

Miss Barclay had a proper pride. Above all, she never forgot that she was a lady born and bred; consequently the colour mounted to her face, and she looked round carefully to see if any of the few people who knew her were in sight before she went up to the



window and asked a third-class ticket to Ironburgh, with the view of counterbalancing her cab expenses : she had driven to the station, as she could not afford to run the risk of damp feet. Then she ensconced herself in her carriage at once, feeling that, though she was not doing a guilty thing, or a thing the laws of the country would take cognisance of, she would rather not be caught in the act. Great good sense, much hard labour, and ample opportunity for learning to estimate things at their true value, had not yet done their perfect work in Miss Barclay.

The compartment was suddenly darkened by a woman standing on the steps and holding on with both hands ; her head was turned round, and she was exclaiming in shrill excited tones, "Guard, guard, must I change carriages at the Ramsay Junction ?" She looked like a bird fluttering on the bars of its cage, or a bat hanging against a wall in the summer twilight. Barbara recognised her voice, and touching her said, "Come in, Miss Stark, you'll easily ascertain that when we come to the junction."

"Miss Barclay ! Do you think so ? Well, I'll trust to you. So you take third class like me ? Jane

insists on it, though I think it scarcely befits papa's daughters; but I have never met with anything unpleasant: working men are very civil and obliging, often more so than people pretending to be gentlemen. I would prefer first class, of course, but Jane proportions our expenditure on system. We have what we call our 'give-away purse,' for charity and other things you know; and she says if we travel first class we must give first class too, and we can't afford that, but we can do both third class, and we'll do it."

Now you may call these ladies goody, and the term fits; but if we must smile at their weakness, why not imitate their strength? Here were they denying themselves, and denying themselves at a point which was double self-denial to them, that their expenditure might be a consistent and well-proportioned whole. How many of us, quite able and willing to laugh at the Misses Stark, do that?

Miss Ann Stark talked to Miss Barclay all the way. She was not even like singing-birds, who sink to silence if you darken their cage; a tunnel only made her tones rather louder, making up by sound for the want of sight. Barbara did not hear the



fourth part of what she said, though she tried hard for a time to do so ; but it sufficed to nod intelligently at intervals till they parted at the Junction. Then her thoughts were at leisure to travel either back or forward. Her heart ached about leaving Miss Boston. She recalled her ; her figure still retaining much of its early elegance, her face shrunken by age, her neat ways, her nice personal habits—her bodily or mental disquietude were great indeed if ever her bed-clothes were tossed or tumbled ; she might have been a tall doll with a wayworn face, undergoing a season of affliction in that bed, so exact were all its appointments. Contrasted with this, the Miss Boston of her childhood came so vividly before her that tears filled her eyes, and she would have gone back had it been possible.

If Miss Boston could have known all this, no doubt she would have left Barbara her fortune on the spot ; but she did not know it,—she could not even imagine it. She sat and stared into the fire, most likely thinking she had no hold on human kindness except through her purse, and even in extremity despising the attention that could be

bought with money, and saying that as she had lived alone she could but die alone. Possibly she was thus driven up closer to the Elder Brother; who can tell? Miss Boston never in her life opened the deeper floodgates of her heart to a human being.

Barbara had only been a fortnight away, and it looked like months. It seemed as if everything must be changed. She walked into the little sitting-room she had left such a short time before, and found a change which startled her nearly as much as Dr. Primrose was startled when he approached his apparently quiet and tranquil dwelling only to see flames burst from every window. However, it was nothing so startling on the surface; indeed, it was a threatened evil to which parents and guardians are generally represented as being singularly blind. Her mother and Miss Dobbie were seated at a small table drawn up to the fire playing backgammon, while Bessie and Mr. Graham Richardson (Mrs. Dods's lodger) were sitting on the sofa with their heads bent over a book lying open on the table. Both were laughing heartily when they looked up to see who entered.

"Aunt Barbara!" cried Bessie, jumping up, "I'm glad you're home again."

"Well, Barbara, you've got back again," said Mrs. Barclay, in measured tones, meant to convey, "You've come back from a sleeveless errand, of course."

"And how blooming you look; the change has done you good," said Miss Dobbie.

"Oh, Mr. Richardson, aunt doesn't know you— aunt, Mr. Richardson. I declare I forgot we had only got acquainted since you went away."

Mr. Richardson shook hands with Miss Barclay, and with the others too. It seemed he was going to leave.

"You needn't run away though aunt's come," said Bessie, "see, you are forgetting your book."

"No, thank you; I'll get it when you're done with it."

He was no sooner gone than Miss Barclay looked at the book; it was an innocent enough work of fiction. She asked Bessie what they had been laughing at; and when she read the passage, she said, "She saw nothing very laughable in that"—which

was not to be wondered at, for she had not a quick sense of the absurd ; and, moreover, the common run of people are not so easily set laughing at forty as at sixteen. To be sure, Mr. Dods could laugh at funny things with the youngest, but, as Mr. Richardson had said, it is an attribute of genius to be always young.

“ You had better finish the book, Barbara ; just finish the book before you take off your cloak and give us any news of your visit,” said her mother, burning with impatience.

“ I can soon tell you my news. Miss Boston is nearly well,” and then Barbara gave a minute account of her visit, describing the people she had seen, etc.

“ And you say Mr. Grant is very often at Blindpits ?”

“ I said he was two or three times there. He seems a pleasant man ; if I had not been a little prejudiced, I would have said very pleasant, indeed.”

“ He may well be pleasant,” said Mrs. Barclay ; “ no doubt he has buttered his own bread thickly enough.”

“ It may be ; but Miss Boston always speaks of

him with respect, which I don't think she would do, if he had made any undue attempts in that way."

"There are many ways of doing things, Barbara ; and I daresay Mr. Grant is chuckling over your simplicity at this moment in leaving Miss Boston, and throwing away such an opportunity as you may never get again."

"But what could I do? We couldn't live at present on the future uncertain chance of Miss Boston's money."

"It's no chance, or it shouldn't be. I'm her nearest kin, nearer than the Grants, who are only a cousin's husband and son ; and common sense should have told you, Barbara, to remain and see justice done."

"If I had remained, I could not, and would not, have mentioned the subject. Money is much, but self-respect is more, much more, and better, and nobler."

"But a lean bone to pick in poverty and obscurity, Barbara."

"I consider it satisfying food, either in adversity or prosperity ; but don't distress yourself unneces-

sarily, mother. Miss Boston, we know, has not forgotten us at any rate. She has all her senses as thoroughly as ever, and I don't doubt but she'll leave her money justly. I would not count on it, but I think so. If she leaves us any, let us be thankful ; or if not, let us say she had a right to do as she liked with her own."

"But she hasn't—she has no right, whatever," exclaimed Mrs. Barclay.

"How old is Mr. Grant, Miss Barclay?" asked Miss Dobbie. She was in the habit of asking apparently irrelevant questions.

"I don't know—probably forty or a little more."

"Then I'll tell you the very plan," exclaimed Miss Dobbie, briskly. "You and he should marry ; if the money's left between you that would keep it together, and if it's all left to him you would get the use of it. Of course the idea is not my own, it has often occurred in novels and plays, but I have known instances of it in real life ; and when the parties are suitable, like you and Mr. Grant, it answers very well."

Even Mrs. Barclay could not forbear smiling.



"If you could suggest it to Mr. Grant," said Bessie; "but you know aunt couldn't make the proposal."

"Certainly not—most assuredly not—I never meant that, you know. But it's quite as likely to occur to him as to me."

"Hardly, Miss Dobbie, I doubt," said Barbara. "Everybody has not your ingenuity."

"But unless he were quite suitable otherwise, I would on no account have you marry him for money; still, money enables one to move in good society, and that would be a great advantage to Bessie at her time of life."

"Untelling! And what society have we, or can we have, here?" groaned Mrs. Barclay.

"Society, grandmamma! Have we not a poet and a preacher next door, not to say a lawyer—isn't Mr. Richardson a lawyer, Miss Dobbie?"

"He said he was in a lawyer's office, meantime."

"Well; a poet, a preacher, and a lawyer—that's surely good society, grandmamma."

"Society, indeed! Mr. Richardson is a gentlemanly lad, but though he may live in this quarter

now for the sake of economy, he'll have too many introductions to good society to waste time on us. But it's well for you, Bessie, that you have a good fund of merriment, for as things are likely to be managed you'll need it all yet, my dear." And Mrs. Barclay withdrew into the region of sighs. If she had been told that she was a selfish incubus upon a brave little household trying to keep its head above water, she would have doubted her ears. Barbara loved her mother, not with the all-confiding love she would have felt for a devoted self-sacrificing mother,—she loved her by instinct and habit, and always remembered that she was a woman of many sorrows. But for a gleam of approbation or comfort she never looked to her. In the course of time it is probable Barbara might have grown hard, even sternly virtuous, but for the influence of her brother's child. To know and feel Bessie's love, surrounding her like an atmosphere, was in its effects like rain on the mown grass, and her love to Bessie was her strongest earthly passion. To shelter her, to walk along with her in a quiet straight line, to the end, was her highest wish ; but whose life is a straight line?

We are sent long rounds to gather experience—to the right to meet a grief we never looked for; to the left to garner joy that was hidden like honey in the rock.

CHAPTER XI.

It might have been thought that by this time Miss Barclay would have learnt that sufficient to the day is the evil thereof, and would have kept herself from worrying about future contingencies. Yet her alarm on finding Mr. Richardson so familiarly ensconced in her dovecot did not speedily subside. She was not one of those blind guardians—most conveniently blind for story-telling purposes—who never waken up to the fact that their children are anything but children, till, some fine day, the reins are jerked out of their hands, and they are left standing astounded, watching the chariot of young life whirl off on its own account.

Bessie was very young, it is true, but Barbara had had instances, oftener than once, of great precocity in this line among her pupils. Only a few weeks before, one of the Misses Leadbitter, about

Bessie's age, had had a love's young dream rudely broken up by being despatched to a remote French town, there to be under the care of the Protestant pastor and his wife—an arrangement from which her mamma hoped the best effects. Barbara hoped and believed better things of her niece; but the bare possibility made her shudder. She asked Miss Dobbie, when she had an opportunity, how often Mr. Richardson had called. Miss Dobbie could be asked a question without immediately laying a line of motives up to it, and another line of schemes away from it.

“Three times,” she said; “and she had not been more pleased with any young man for a long time.”

Miss Barclay resolved that, gradually and quietly, his acquaintance should be dropped; that, she thought, would not be difficult, and would be safe.

“Bessie,” she said, “Mrs. Dods's lodger seems rather a nice lad?”

“Who—Mr. Richardson? Yes; very.”

“How did you get acquainted with him?”

“Well, I don't know that I should tell you.”

“Not tell me! Why, what should prevent you?”

“Because it's connected with a secret.”

"A secret?"

"Yes; a secret that only he and I know."

"And that I am not to know?"

"You needn't look so serious, aunt Barbara. I daresay I might tell you if you would promise not to tell any one, especially Mr. ——"

"Mr. —— Who?" asked Miss Barclay, anxiously.

"Mr. Pettigrew," and Bessie fell into a fit of merry laughter.

"Don't trifle, Bessie."

"I'm not trifling. He's so awfully curious, and Mr. Dods does not want him to know."

"What has Mr. Dods to do with it?"

"He has everything to do with it, I'm sorry to say. But you haven't promised not to tell?"

"I promise."

"Then you know it's some time ago—a good while before you went away—Mr. Dods sent some poems to the editor of the *Ironburgh Magazine*, and he got a complimentary letter with them when they were sent back; then he sent them to the editor again, offering them for nothing, and he has been expecting to hear of them or see them in the *Maga-*

zine ever since, and has written about them twice; and no notice of any kind has been taken of them or him—a shame such usage; and he an old man too; only the editor thinks him a boy, which shows that editors are no wiser than other people. Mr. Dods, Mr. Richardson, and I, have had consultations on the subject—that's how I know Mr. Richardson. And really I find him conversible; and it's as well to get books direct from himself as through Mr. Dods."

"I don't know," said aunt Barbara, somewhat relieved now that the momentous secret was laid bare; "you know he is engaged all day; and I shouldn't like to have your lessons often interrupted in the evening."

"No; not often, of course. I think you would like him. Do you know, I took an opportunity of reading to him. I didn't tell him the object I had in view, but I wanted an impartial opinion, and I think he is likely to be a good judge. He said I read admirably; that I had a talent for it decidedly, he thought. Then he said, 'Women read in public now; but if I had sisters who wanted to do that, I wouldn't let them.' 'Why not?' I said. 'Just because ——. I

had a little brother that used to say that when you asked him the reason of anything.' 'But that's no reason,' I said. 'It is better than a reason. It left you to gather up all that was in his mind that he couldn't express.' 'But I can't gather up what's in your mind.' 'For one thing, appearing in public rubs the bloom off a woman.' 'Does starving in private preserve her bloom?' 'But she shouldn't starve; men should work for her.' 'But if she has no men?' 'She ought to have; that's all.' I said, 'Even if I had men to work for me, I would rather—that is, if they expected me to mend their shirts—I would rather read for so many guineas a night and be independent. It is a frightful business mending things, especially shirts.' 'I don't know anything about that.' 'Neither do I; but I can imagine what it is.'"

"Bessie," said Miss Barclay, "did you really run on in that way to a perfect stranger?"

"A stranger! I had seen him often before I spoke to him; and I had spoken twice to him before we had that discussion. How long should people know each other before they get beyond the weather?"

"I recollect my grandinamma used to say that you should know a person seven years before you took the liberty of snuffing the candles, or poking the fire."

"Ay; but you see people travelled in waggons or on pillions in those days, and things had to be consistent."

"To rattle on in that way with me or Mrs. Dods, Bessie, is all very well, but"—

"It's better with Mr. Richardson; he puts his mind to you, as Dr. Johnson says."

"Really, Bessie, don't be ridiculous. Nobody quotes in society. At one time you repeat phrases you have read as if you were an oracle, and the next you are positively childish, suggesting, as you did when the price of bread rose, that we should live on rolls, which are always the same price."

"I'm not good at arithmetic. Mr. Richardson says I'm behind in that; he offered to give me lessons in it once or twice a-week if I liked."

"If you like to pay attention, I am quite equal to teaching you arithmetic."

"He said he would teach me book-keeping by double entry."

"Do you want to learn book-keeping by double entry?"

"Well, yes; it might be useful, you know."

"Then I'll teach you."

"O aunt! do you know it?"

"I'm teaching it at present to one of my pupils—one of the boys."

"Then that will be better. I wouldn't like Mr. Richardson to know how stupid I am."

The prudent aunt lost a night's sleep planning how best to stifle this acquaintance that had grown up like Jonah's gourd in her short absence. Mr. Richardson might be good, or he might be bad, or both, or neither; but quietly and effectually his visits must be discouraged. Any danger beyond dreamy idleness she did not anticipate for Bessie; but in her circumstances that was enough—or in any circumstances.

Now, if Miss Barclay had been less anxious and more trustful, she might have saved herself all this vexation. Bessie was as innocent of all thoughts of

Mr. Richardson, or any other person in the shape of a lover, as the chair over which she threw her gown at night ; and if Miss Barclay could only have gone into Mr. Richardson's room, and over his shoulder read the letter he was writing, she would have been instantly lightened of all her care on this score. That letter was to this effect :—

“DEAR JOHN—You don't write often, and when you do write, why do you so studiously omit all reference to S. A.? But if I am to write at all I must write of her. Jack, I love her as never man loved woman. She is my last thought at night and my first in the morning. I shall never love another ; and if she is to be won by man, I'll win her.

“I can't flatter myself that I have made much way yet. Being a little older than I, she gives herself airs of wisdom, and she is kind—very kind ; if she would only be less kind, or in a different way somehow, I would have more hope. I sometimes envy you, Jack, your plain sailing ; yet no, I like a chase, if only I were less miserable. If I lose her—then—— I must stop—the idea drives me mad.

“I have got acquainted with a pretty girl next
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door, little more than a child. She says queer things, at least for a child to say ; but I fancy she has never been among children, and she lives with a lot of funny old women, and crams her little head with all manner of books. If I could talk as freely to S. A. as to her, I would get on. What I would give to talk over her head, and make her feel that I am a man and her master. I think she fancies I'm a boy. I can't go to the A.'s every night ; but I contrive very often to meet her brother as he is going home in the evening, and he can hardly help asking me to go with him ; and then, O Jack ! I wonder if I appear to other people the fool I feel myself to be ; but unless she's a stone I'll win her yet," etc. etc.

This letter, when finished, was addressed,

“ JOHN GRANT, Esq.,

“ Grantsburn,

“ Heatherburgh.”

Mr. John opened it at the breakfast-table.

“ That's a letter from Graham, isn't it ?” said Miss Grant.

“ Yes.”

"And what's he saying. Is he well?"

"Hm!—saying? He's saying he's a fool—a rash imprudent fool; and I quite agree with him."

"What's he been doing?" asked Mr. Grant senior, quietly.

"Read that," said John; "or, aunt, you had better read it aloud," and he handed it across the table.

Now a letter of this kind, written at midnight under the gas, when read in the cool clear light of morning by people only indirectly interested in it, can hardly look otherwise than foolish.

"Poor boy!" said Mr. Grant, kindly.

"That's what is called calf-love, isn't it?" said Miss Grant; "it will probably pass off."

"Pass off!—little fear; at least the love may, but not the lady," said John. "The great simpleton, he is so afraid of losing her; why, they'll have him tied neck and heels before he knows where he is. She is a dozen years older than he, the oldest of half-a-score who haven't a rap in the world, he a likely young fellow; having waited so long, she's safe to wait a little longer."

"Do you *know* all that?" asked his father.

"Yes; and, what's more, he knows it, for I picked it out of him."

"But she may be a good girl for all that," said Miss Grant.

"Yes, she may," said her brother; "but a boy at his age is a poor judge in such matters—a poor judge—it's a pity." It is possible Mr. Grant was thinking of his own boyish wedding, which had produced such a meagre crop of happiness.

"Had you not better write to him, James, and give him a word of warning—say how imprudent it is?"

"But it is not imprudent if the lady were suitable. He is every way likely to get a good situation as soon as he is ready for it. The Marquis is to use his interest for him on my recommendation, and he has not a close tie in the world. If I were to interfere, he would think I was taking advantage of the small obligations I had laid him under, and in any case he would resent interference. I know how he would feel, quite well; but, perhaps, you or his mother could make a delicate job of it."



"I have said all to him on the subject that I can ; but he is bent on making a mess of it, and you'll find it so," said John.

"I'll write, however," said Miss Grant, "and try what I can do, only I would like to know the lady ; but whatever she is, she is too old for him. Poor Graham ! it's a pity he should throw himself away."

Thus Miss Barclay, Mr. and Miss Grant, and his stepmother, were all filled with anxious thoughts about "poor Graham ;" while he, now in a state of elation and now in despair, found time and heart to sympathise with his landlord on the injustice and cruelty of the editor of the *Ironburgh Magazine*, who persisted in making no sign, although he got three letters, one after another, from his supposed juvenile contributor, which he tossed into the waste-basket after merely glancing his eye over them. He was past enjoying curiosities of this kind, and went through his work as a surgeon goes through his operations—doing his best, and keeping his feelings in his pocket, finding it dangerous to expose them to the open air.

CHAPTER XII.

MISS BARCLAY had her own ideas as to who should tempt the responsibilities of print, and it was her opinion that the presumption and self-conceit of Mr. Dods were unbounded. She sympathised with Mrs. Dods, as was natural, for were they not both the working bees of their respective households? Undoubtedly Mr. Dods was self-conceited, but you could hardly wish him otherwise; it was the relish in his character, it was so very genuine and unadulterated; without it he would have been a pitiable object indeed—a snail abroad in a very rough world without his shell.

I could have liked to have drawn Mrs. Dods sitting at her husband's feet, worshipping in wifely fashion, and sacrificing herself, a willing and barely conscious victim, on the altar of duty and affection; but, given a man, or woman either, who shirks the

duties of life, and you can hardly expect that the persons who are doomed to be ground along with them in the quern, one stone of which is very limited means, and the other constant anxiety, will exhibit all the suavity, the bloom, the efflorescence, which they might have done in different circumstances. But they may love each other dearly for all that. Mr. and Mrs. Dods loved each other, so did Miss Barclay and her mother; still, there was the daily jar and worry, of which, when death comes, the survivor feels all the guilt, and would give the world to have an opportunity of wiping it out; although I take leave to doubt, if the opportunity were granted, the jar and worry would begin again. Who knows?

Miss Barclay was returning from her daily labour, and she was thinking, with very small complacency, of Mr. Dods; not that she despised him—she despised no one—but she was angry, rather unreasonably, with poor Mr. Dods. She was annoyed at what she thought his most absurd presumption, and at his making Bessie his confidant; but the root of her annoyance was the fact that he had brought Bessie and Mr. Richardson together, “to consult” about his trash.

She was just feeling provoked at this when the unconscious Mr. Dods came alongside of her and lifted his hat. He had never worked much for his wife, and it had never struck him as out of place that she should work pretty hard for him; but he had a kind of chivalry in his manner towards women, and he lifted his hat to Miss Barclay. She had no wish for his company at the moment, but he kept by her, and in a few minutes Mr. Richardson passed them at a rapid pace, hardly giving Miss Barclay time to bestow upon him the style of bow she had planned as best calculated to keep him at a distance.

“The lad’s in a hurry the night,” said Mr. Dods. “I’m thinking he’s away to see his sweetheart.”

“Indeed!” said Barbara, with animation, and a sudden relenting towards her companion.

“Ay; I jalouse so. No that he ever told me in so many words, but I can put that and that thegether. He runs in and dresses himsel’, and runs out again, and comes back either unco low or unco high in the spirits; and I whiles get bits o’ paper lying about his room with ‘Sarah Anderson’ written a’ ower them, or a verse to S. A., or something o’ that kind; and I’ve

watched the symptoms, for I have a strong interest in the laddie; no to say that I'm engaged on a poem entitled 'Young Love,' and it's useful to hae a model sitting afore ye."

An expression akin to contempt appeared in Miss Barclay's face. She said, "Would old love not be a more appropriate theme for you, Mr. Dods?"

"I'll no say—I'll maybe try my hand on that next; but it's aye best to begin at the beginning."

"There's so much poetry made already, Mr. Dods, that I think you might despair of putting anything in a newer or better light."

There's no call for onybody to despair, Miss Barclay. I was just readin' Goldsmith the other night, and it struck me I wasna unco far ahint him, and he's lived and will live."

"How many people read him? I understand such a style as his is obsolete now."

"Ay; but folk maun be brought back to intelligible language, and weaned frae the balderdash that's ca'ed poetry now, that can be made neither head nor tail o'."

"If you think you can do that, Mr. Dods; but

it would have been easier and better for you if you had happened to have been born a hundred years sooner."

"Maybe, maybe; I wadna been soomin against the tide."

They were near their own door, and met Mrs. Dods. "Tammas," she said, "gang yont to thae folk and tell them to send a cart o' coals the first thing in the morning; and see, here's the siller to pay for them. The first thing in the morning," she repeated after him, "or there'll be nae breakfast in the house."

Mr. Dods obeyed.

"Do you think the gudeman's looking onything weel?" said Mrs. Dods to Miss Barclay. "I whiles fancy no."

"Oh, I think much in his usual."

Because of her bulk Mrs. Dods ascended the stairs slowly, and she kept speaking, "He's had a gey bit turn o' the cauld, and it mak's a body anxious."

"That's not so good; you should not let him go out at night. My mother has been complaining a little too, but as the season advances we'll hope they'll improve."



The postman came up behind them with a letter for Miss Barclay, and the ladies parted—Mrs. Dods thinking, “Her mother compleening! I wonder when she does anything else. She’s a heavy handfu’;” and Miss Barclay saying to herself, “Really I don’t think I could have patience with Mr. Dods.” We don’t need to go to marine animals and the wonders of the shore for surprising instances of adaptation.

Barbara had received her letter outside her own door, and consequently had it in her option to suppress all mention of its arrival; she determined to do so. Barbara kept a good many things to herself; she was aware that anything her mother knew soon became public property. Besides, Mrs. Barclay would build far more on this letter than it would carry, and she might only be the more disappointed in her expectations.

The letter contained a twenty-pound note, and on the flap of the envelope was written, in an antiquated style, the word “Well.—B. B.”

Barbara was very genial this evening. She was generally cheerful and kindly from a sense of duty,

however she felt ; but the relief from anxiety about Bessie, and Miss Boston's gift—doubly welcome as coming from her—made her very happy. Bessie remarked it, and said, "Aunt, you look as if you had got good news."

"Do I? I have been vexed and anxious about the conduct of one of my pupils for some time, and I got a very satisfactory explanation about it to-day, which has entirely set my mind at rest."

"Which of them was it, aunt ; and what had she done?"

"She hadn't done anything, I was glad to find ; it was all a mistake." Then it struck her she might show Miss Boston's envelope without danger, "And I heard from Miss Boston to-day," she concluded.

Mrs. Barclay suddenly looked all attention.
"And what does she say?"

"Just one word, but a very satisfactory one. There is the letter, if you can call it a letter," and she pointed to the monosyllable Miss Boston had written.

"Was that all?—do you mean to say there was nothing in the envelope but that?" asked Mrs. Barclay, excitedly.

"That was all she wrote," said Barbara, growing red as she said it; and I am sorry to convict her of an equivocation. That her mother was foolish and imprudent accounts for it, but does not excuse it.

"Not even to ask for me, when she knows all I have suffered! I suppose she means that *she's* well, poor creature!" said Mrs. Barclay, with lofty dignity; "but it's what she's most interested in, to be sure." Then, in a business tone, "She must be getting imbecile; only an imbecile person would have sent a thing like that. And you call *that* satisfactory, Barbara; I would set it down as a positive insult, unless she's imbecile."

"I don't know," said Miss Dobbie. "I recollect, on one occasion, Miss Davie"——

"For any sake don't speak of Miss Davie, when one is sufficiently annoyed already," said Mrs. Barclay, in a tone of exasperation.

"I was only going to say," pursued Miss Dobbie, meekly, "that it was rather a remarkable occasion, and I considered it an instance in point; but if you have no wish to hear it"——

Barbara had been thinking how she could soothe

Miss Dobbie, but Bessie's nimble wits came to the rescue. "I'm very anxious to hear all about it, Miss Dobbie," she said, "and you'll tell me to-morrow, will you? Miss Davie must have been one of the best women that ever lived."

"She was—she was indeed;" and the tears gathered in Miss Dobbie's eye.

"It's an easy thing to be good when people have nothing to vex and thwart them," said Mrs. Barclay.

"If you mean that dear Miss Davie had nothing to vex or thwart her, you are very much mistaken, Mrs. Barclay," said Miss Dobbie, mildly.

"Well, well; she's at the end of her troubles now, as I'll be before long;" and she pointed her sentence with a deep sigh.

Miss Dobbie being planted beside Mrs. Barclay was another instance of nice adaptation. It has been said that she had lived for fifty years in the world to very little purpose, and so it appeared to me when I first met her, but it was a rash judgment. Any one who has learned to subdue pride, and envy, and malice, and evil speaking, and to replace them with that charity which thinketh no

evil, has not lived in vain ; nay, has fulfilled the very end of his being. Perhaps these vices had never been very rampant in Miss Dobbie. I did not know her in earlier life, but unquestionably they were there to develope or crush, and she had crushed them. Though in the trying and touchy position of poor relation, she did not think more highly of herself than she ought to think ; and this very Christmas, when the invitation she had set her heart upon, to the family party at Dobbiestanes, never came, and all her little labours of love at her dress were lost, she never said a bitter word, but passed it over lightly, although, I daresay, in her own room, in the dark, she cried about it. She was not intellectually strong, but she earned Barbara Barclay's gratitude by the way she demeaned herself towards her mother.

CHAPTER XIII.

JOHN GRANT was a prudent young man—a really good type of the prudent young man of the period. He could hardly be accused of snobbery, yet somehow his chosen friends all stood, like peach-trees, on the sunny side of fortune's wall. Miss Boston's domestic accused him of meanness, but she was a woman wholly devoid of the nice delicacy that prefers a good word or a genial smile to a palm crossed with silver, and she was in the habit of clothing her ideas in language strong rather than refined, so that her opinion goes for little.

But there was another woman—young, good, and generous—who had made him her hero. John was matrimonially engaged—prudently, it need not be said—but he was over head and ears in love too, only a shallower depth effected that with him than in some cases. The lady had been easily courted,



and any other youth of suitable age and prospects crossing her path before John would probably have been equally successful; but in saying that it is not meant to undervalue her. She was good, very good, and time only increased her goodness.

John, being thus situated wisely and well himself, was vexed that his friend Graham Richardson should land himself in a mess, and talked over the matter with "Mary." Mary thought the inequality in point of age a decided stumbling-block, but the facts that she was one of a family of ten and would not bring a sixpence with her, she could not see to be obstacles.

"John," she said, "if papa had been poor, and I had had a great many brothers and sisters, you would still have loved me, would you not?"

"Oh, to be sure; but there's no use speculating on what might have been; the thing is, to act wisely in present circumstances, and the cases are different. I have a father able to help me, and the certainty of a position, so that it wouldn't matter though my wife had nothing; but he has no one to back him, and he may or may not get a good situation."

"But, John, if he were to get a good situation,

would it not be cruel if, as you think, the lady is so fond of him, to"—

"Oh, fond! I daresay you measure everybody by yourself, Mary. I shouldn't wonder but she's been fond of more than him in her day. She would recover."

Mary was shocked. She said, "Really, John, you know best. You should write to him again and say what you think. Poor Graham, I should be sorry he did a foolish thing."

And John wrote. A few mornings after, Mr. Dods carried three letters into Mr. Richardson's bedchamber, and found him still extended in bed and fast asleep. With the awkwardness which is fabled to accompany genius Mr. Dods knocked a heavy book off the table as he laid down the letters, and roused his lodger, who exclaimed, "What is it? Is that you, Mr. Dods? It's not very late, is it?" The bedclothes were tossed as if a mighty wind had passed over them in the night.

"It's just eight o'clock, sir."

"Nonsense. You don't mean to say I've slept till eight o'clock?"



"It's eight o'clock, and ye'll ken best yersel' if ye was sleeping or no. There's your letters."

"See; fling them here. I'll read them before I rise."

He turned himself round and looked at his letters. "From John," he said to himself. "I hope he sticks to his plan of ignoring S. A. since that's all over."

He hastily tossed the letters down, turned again and hid his face in the pillow, then starting up hurriedly, he dressed like a man with a wager depending on his speed, picked up his unopened letters, and went to his sittingroom.

Mr. Dods was seated before the fire extending his long thin fingers to the warmth, and looking round complacently on the room he had dusted and the breakfast-table he had laid; and surely a poet, without detracting from the dignity of himself or his calling, may enjoy the consciousness of having done a housemaid's work thoroughly. He rose when Mr. Richardson entered.

"I didna expect ye for the best part of an hour yet, but you've no let the grass grow under your feet."

"No," was the short answer, and Mr. Dods

understood that in some sort his lodger was ruffled that morning, and turned over in his mind whether any of the letters could be the cause; but when he came back with the toast he saw them on the table unopened.

"Take your seat again, Mr. Dods, if you are inclined; you'll not disturb me," said Mr. Richardson.

"You're very kind, sir." Then, seizing the opening, "That creature Pettigrew cam' hame last night."

"Yes?" said Graham, interrogatively.

"And he paid his rent, as he aye does, like clock-wark, a month in advance; and the wife was pleased, and asked him to tak' the book, as she whiles does when she's in the key. Weel, he prayed for me as if I had been Mahomet's coffin, hanging atween heaven and earth; and he left a pair o' boots in the kitchen that had been in every glaur-hole on the road. And there's no way o' being even wi' him—no way," and Mr. Dods stopped, in a flutter of impotent anger.

Though steeped in his own woes, the youth—who took his view of Mr. Dods from the ground opposite that from which Miss Barclay made her estimate of him—said soothingly, "It is most dignified, Mr. Dods,



to take no notice of such as he. If you were to pay any attention to what he says it would only gratify him."

"I daursay you're no far wrang; but the bile that creature stirs in me, no tongue o' man can tell."

"It's not worth the while of such a man as you, Mr. Dods, to let yourself be irritated by him. If I were you, I would just shut eyes and ears to him."

"It's easy speaking," said Mr. Dods, emphatically; "it's easy speaking, but you're no done wi' your breakfast, Mr. Richardson—you've eaten naething."

"I'm done though: I can't be bothered eating this morning."

Mr. Dods removed the things quietly, and considered that this loss of appetite was another hint for the poem he had in hand; and in musing over it, and shaking it into rhyme, he escaped from his Pettigrew-some worries.

Graham drew his letters to him once more. He looked at the back of them. "From my mother and Miss Grant, too; what can they all be writing about at once?" and with a slight feeling of curiosity he opened his mother's first.

“MY DEAR GRAHAM,—Had the season of the year and my infirm health permitted, I would have been in Ironburgh at this time for the purpose of seeing you. Could you possibly find time to pay me a visit ?

“I am very anxious to have a conversation with you in regard to a subject of great interest to us both. In the meantime, I hope you will not be tempted to do anything rashly ; there is a proverb which says, ‘Marry in haste, and repent at leisure.’ It is my most earnest wish that this may not be your fate. Would it not be possible for me to make the acquaintance of a certain young lady I hear of, *before* she is irrevocably engaged to become my daughter-in-law ? The advice of a female friend is of incalculable value to a young man at such a crisis. Dear Graham, with anxious love, I am, etc. etc.”

Miss Grant’s note was to the same effect. The two ladies had traversed the matter between them ; but they had not arranged pointedly which was to write ; the consequence of which was that both wrote.

Their young friend put down their missives with a queer bitter smile on his face. "Oh, Sara, Sara!" he said. "So you were to have been sent out on sight, like a parcel of goods, to be returned if not approved of—a cool proposal for two good women to make. Now for John's; I wonder if he strikes the same note."

"MY DEAR GRAHAM,—You reproach me for not writing about S. A. I should think you would not feel particularly obliged for what I have said on the subject already; however, if it will gratify you, I'll harp a little more on that string.

"When you fairly make the plunge, you'll be immensely surprised at your own success; but I won't, that's all. I think I've said as much before, but I'm going to put the thing in a different point of view this time.

"Loving the lady as you do to distraction, do you think it kind or honourable to engage her to a penniless man who has no certainty even of a situation? With your ideas of generosity, I wonder you could think of it for a moment. No, no, Graham; don't

engage yourself till you have a home to bring her to, and an income sufficient to make her comfortable. I talked it over with Mary last night, and she advised me to write to you ; perhaps her word may go farther than mine. M'Vicar has been laid up with cold, and I have been attending his patients for the last week. I am, yours truly, JOHN GRANT."

Graham crushed these letters into his pocket, and went about his daily business. On coming home at night he wrote to John Grant.

"DEAR JOHN,—You still think S. A. will jump at me ; and you talked it over with Mary. Did you talk as irreverently of women to her ? Take care she doesn't quarrel with you. Well ; your wisdom is at fault for once. As you express it, I made 'the plunge' last night. She was kind and very delicate ; but all hope is over for me. I had hoped against hope—there—I'll not say anything more of myself. My mother and Miss Grant have both written to me ; they are good women, but they forget the dignity of their sex strangely ; they want Miss A. sent for their inspection before she shall be offered the stupendous



honour of marrying me. Jack, I could almost laugh and *greet* together. My idea of a lady is, that she will not, unsought, be won—fruit ready to drop into the mouth, if such there be, I couldn't relish ; but my notions may be old-fashioned. It is very lonely here these long nights. I cannot go to the Andersons' now. Sara leaves for India shortly with her husband ; and I don't know many people, and don't care to. I hear the piano in the next house : if I were an enthusiast in music, I would find my way often there. I told you of the young girl and old ladies who live there, and I'll go occasionally—a man is made to fight with disappointment. I shall write to Mrs. Richardson and Miss Grant, and put an end to their anxiety about me ; they will be glad likely, for they cannot know what I have lost. If we were busy at the office just now I would stay there all the evening ; but we are not. How do you like being rung out of bed in the middle of the night ? Remember me to Mary ; I am grateful for the interest she takes in me.—I am," etc. etc.

John read this letter to his aunt and father.

"Aunt," he said, when he had done ; "you're in his black books as well as me."

"Well, John, now that he puts the thing in that light, it was rather a curious proposal to make ; but his mother and I were so anxious about him."

"And justly," said John. "My notion of the lady is borne out—she had kept him dangling till she got the other fellow brought up to the point."

"John," said his father, "you have stumbled into the wrong profession ; you should have been a lawyer."

"I think," said Miss Grant, "you have hardly a right to say that of the lady—she couldn't help Graham running after her."

"Couldn't she ?" said John.

"No ; I don't think she could," said Mr. Grant, "and long may Graham keep his high ideal of women."

"The ideal is all well enough," rejoined John, "only he thinks every woman he sees an impersonation of it. These people next door to him that I've heard him speak of, one of them will be his next ideal ; the niece, or, as he has a taste for old ladies,

more probably the aunt ; you'll see. In fact, he had better, perhaps, have got Miss Anderson and been done with it, who knows ?”

“ Who knows, indeed ?” said Mr. Grant, “ but if I know Graham, it will be a time, at least, before he is ready to worship a new goddess.”

“ Poor fellow,” said Miss Grant, “ I'm sorry for him ; it is a dreary thing for a boy to be alone in lodgings.”

“ Very,” said Mr. Grant, as he was leaving the room, and there was more in his tone than assent ; there was sympathy—he was thinking, perhaps, that it was a dreary thing for a man to be alone in his own house. True, he was not actually alone ; had he not his sister and his son ? Miss Grant was a good woman, who both loved and respected her brother, as he did her, and yet there was no very close intercourse between them. It is not uncommon for good people to live together in the same house without blending. It would have been unnatural if he had not been fond of, and proud of, his son, as his son was of him ; but neither did they blend. He never acknowledged the idea to himself ; however, if Graham Richardson had

these near relatives beside him, then he was wicked; for there were times when he did so feel. He did not believe he could ever fall in love—he was past that sort of thing—but he had thought of marrying in a quiet judicious way; only he had never seen the woman he could offer even that style of matrimony to. He must have been difficult to please, for ladies were not scarce in the county, and Mr. Grant had a wide acquaintance. Mrs. Gascoigne, for instance—she was a lady equal to any position; and whether Mr. Grant surmised it or not, the public of Heatherburgh were not slow to say that she looked upon the vacant Mrs. Grantship with anything but contempt. They had known each other long, and Mrs. Gascoigne had grown confidential in confabs anent “dear Mary” and John, and had even related to Mr. Grant the circumstances of her husband’s death and funeral, with tears coming and going at the right places, and in quantity not to disfigure the fair face of the widow—they had

exactly the effect on him that a painted fire would have had ; and he left, saying to himself, " Preserve me from being ' poor dear Grant,' although she would be sure of the Marquis at my funeral, I think." The widow was a sharp, clever, clear-sighted woman, but there was a hard business-ring about both her matter and manner. Yet she was not heartless ; only when a grief has been taken out and exhibited to every acquaintance for a term of twenty years, it becomes, even to its possessor, like an old coin worn smooth by friction, however deep and well defined the die may have been originally.

Then there was Mrs. Dyce, a very young gentle widow, who had lost a husband and two children at a stroke by fever, and who seemed ready to twine her tendrils round any strong support that might be near ; but neither did the melting style suit Mr. Grant : and there was Miss Proudfoot, who generally lived at Edenside with her brother-in-law and sister, Mr. and Mrs. Ainslie of that ilk ; these were neighbours, and if Mr. Grant chanced to look in there, he was as sure of his dinner as if he had gone to a hotel and ordered it. They were new people, and Miss Boston said " it

would take generations before they could be licked into gentlefolks, and long before that, there would be a scail among the siller." Miss Boston, as became the last of the Bostons of Bostonfield,

"Shunned on every side
The splash of newly-mounted pride."

But the Ainslies and other settlers of a like order went on their way rejoicing notwithstanding; and seeing she was a lady, left their cards at her door—they never got farther—although immensely tickled at her ways and oddity.

Of course the Marquis and Marchioness of Heatherdale, and the young Lords and Ladies Heatherdale, looked on Mr. Grant as a faithful and valuable dependant, and slumped the small fry in and around Heatherburgh as being undistinguishable as layers of society; and when they caught an inkling of the fact that one Heatherburgh star considered itself to differ, very decidedly indeed, from another Heatherburgh star in glory, it struck them as an eminently good joke—probably angels flying about think pride in the Heatherdale family as good a joke, if angels have a

sense of humour, and the heart to laugh at what goes on in such a world as ours.

And as for the brilliant idea, conceived by Miss Dobbie, of uniting the family fortunes by espousing Barbara Barclay, that had never crossed the remotest corner of Mr. Grant's brain. It had glanced across Miss Boston, we know, and she had sung Barbara's praises; she was the best of nurses; but what had Mr. Grant to do with nurses? And it is vexatious to know that he had described her to his sister in terms that admitted of no hope; he had answered Miss Grant's inquiries respecting her by saying that "she was a fat sensible-looking person." Not that fat ladies are never married; only their admirers don't use such blunt expressions. Now, it is not to be denied that she was a little stout, but, to my eyes, she always looked well; and the reader may take my word for it that the adjectives "fat" and "greasy," applied to her by Mr. Grant and Dr. M'Vicar, are quite out of the question; the men's eyes must have been holden that they did not see. Tastes differ, it is true; but when a woman gets past the bloom of youth, is she not the better of a little *enbonpoint*?

Certainly it is much preferable to the stick automaton-like effect of gaunt leanness. But it is absurd in me to be apologising for Miss Barclay's appearance; she was a serene, pretty-looking woman—fat or not fat. It was surprising she did not go to the extreme of leanness, considering the amount of work she did and her little wearing anxieties.

Her anxiety about the acquaintance that had sprung up between Bessie and Mr. Richardson having been completely set at rest, she resumed her ordinary courteous bearing both towards him and Mr. Dods. It was very unlike her, ever to have dropped it; but as a hen will do much in defence of her chickens, even a governess may be excused if she forgets the proprieties so far on behalf of a niece. She made it up to Graham, by encouraging his visits and getting to like him. It was difficult not to like him when you knew him; though, at first, appearances were rather against him. He was very tall, and what Mrs. Dods called "ill hung thegither;" but in the course of a year or two he gave promise of improving, possibly of even being good-looking. He liked Miss Barclay; liked her sweet face, her sturdy figure, and her equally

sturdy common sense, and liked and respected her laborious life. He was amused with the other inmates. He did not blame himself for being amused at Bessie's expense, but he was doubtful of the propriety of getting amusement out of the two old ladies; only he couldn't help it.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE evenings that Graham Richardson had ere-while spent in questionable bliss beside the beloved Sara, he now spent in the calm, quiet atmosphere of Mrs. Barclay's little sitting-room. If there were no eyes to watch for a glance that would send him into the seventh heaven, neither could he get any sudden tumble into the mud of despair. That celestial sickening see-saw was over, not to be recalled.

If Miss Barclay could have known this she would again have set herself to climb the hill Difficulty. Happily for her peace of mind she did not know it. To have encouraged his visits for the purpose of keeping him out of mischief, at the slightest risk to her one ewe lamb, was a stretch of pure philanthropy of which she was not capable, but she performed the good deed unconsciously.

Graham was very soon at home, and acted the

elder brother to Bessie, with much pleasure to himself and profit to her, and even satisfaction to Miss Barclay, who began to think him a valuable auxiliary, for he supported her views in respect to the impropriety of Bessie attempting to become a public character.

"But, aunt," said Bessie; "what am I to do? Just point out how I am to make money. I don't mean a few guineas a quarter by teaching music, but money to make us comfortable."

"Are we uncomfortable, Mr. Richardson, do you think?" said Barbara.

"I think not. I'm very comfortable here at any-rate; and I think, Bessie, I once said to you that if I had sisters I would not allow them to appear in public."

"But I'm not your sister; and, although I were, I don't know that you would have any right to prevent me doing as I wished. I might as well dictate to you."

"Perhaps 'allow' was too strong a word. We would have advised each other."

"And you would have taken my advice?"

"I would at least have given it my best consideration."

"Would you take my advice as it is—now?"

"Bessie," said her aunt, "what possible advice can you have to give to Mr. Richardson?"

"I would advise him to be a tailor; it is a quiet useful employment, and if he is always busy with his needle he will be out of harm's way. Lawyers are a bad set, and gentlemen's factors—if that's what he means to be—always toady the great and oppress the poor. I have met them often enough to know them."

"Where?" said Graham, innocently.

"In books—scores of them; and they are always rejecting virtuous tenants, or worse."

"Ah! but you mustn't take your notions from books altogether. I have an uncle a factor, and a better man never lived. To be sure there are wicked lawyers, as there are wicked clergymen and doctors; but I am not aware that tailors are generally better than other people."

"And are you aware that women who slave in

a small private way are better than those who try public life?"

"Appearing in public makes a woman bold and brassy."

"Don't say bold and brassy; say, active and energetic; not so agreeable, perhaps, but I wouldn't mind that; and more able to make something of this life; and for the next, I think an active energetic angel will be as much to the purpose as one only accustomed to the use of her needle."

"Really, Bessie," said her aunt, "I'm surprised at you. Among all the odd scraps of rhyme you pick up, don't you remember the verse which says—

"The trivial round, the common task
Shall furnish all we ought to ask—
Room to deny ourselves, a road
To bring us, daily, nearer God."

"I remember well enough, but"—

"But, Miss Barclay, Bessie has a soul above buttons and needles and pins," said Graham.

"No, I haven't; I don't pretend to like sewing, but I can do it. It's not the publicity I like—I don't like it—it's the profitable employment."

"But Bessie, my dear, an employment may be profitable in one sense and very unprofitable in another."

"Well, well, auntie," said she, resignedly. "I have long thought over the thing, and I don't see it as you see it, but I'll give up my plan."

"That's right," said Graham. "You'll not regret it, I think."

"I'll not promise that. I am getting old, and I have done nothing yet; to-morrow is my birthday, and I shall be seventeen—very old.

"Even such is time, that takes on trust
Our youth, our joys, our all we have,
And pays us but in age and dust'"——

Graham burst out laughing, and Bessie's face grew red, and he apologised in a lame way by saying he couldn't help it, it was so ridiculous to hear her speak of time having taken her youth and joys.

"Well, I often feel old; as old as the hills."

"That's because your time is not fully and usefully filled up, Bessie," said Miss Barclay; "I must see to that. Your music pupils, who come on Monday, will help so far; and I have some white-seam I have



not been able to overtake, I'll give you it to do ; and you must get some good work in history to study carefully ; and I think you ought to try cooking, a knowledge of cooking is always valuable to a woman, and then you'll have no time for vague fancies."

"Very well ; I'll do the sewing. I would like to grow useful and industrious, and I'll read any amount of history—that'll be no punishment ; and the cooking will be delightful. I am so fond of experiments, and the combinations one can try are almost endless. If Mr. Dods had thrown his imagination into his business, I think he would have liked it."

"If he had thrown his attention into it, Bessie, it would have been more to the purpose, and you must not begin experimenting on our poor little dinners ; inventions and experiments are ruinous : you must only learn what has been done before, and if you do that, I'll think you have done very well."

"There, Bessie," said Graham, "your wings are clipped again you see. You must bring your mind down to be a good plain cook ; but then, perhaps, your youth and joys may be buried in a pasty, or smothered in a pudding."

"She will be more likely to exhume them, Mr. Richardson," said Miss Barclay; "at least I—and I can't suppose myself singular—have always felt an amount of satisfaction in putting a piece of work, whatever it was, out of my hands well done—that amply repaid me for the trouble I had taken."

"But, auntie, I'm not like you. I never do anything well enough to be satisfied with it."

"But you can't expect to do things well at first, my dear. Rome was not built in a day."

"Of course not," said Graham. "Come, Bessie, play a little before I go."

As she went to the old fifth-rate piano and touched it with the hand of a born musician, a vision came over him of the Andersons' large well-lighted drawing-room, filled with a flock of animated young people all in a flutter of light-hearted gaiety, and it did occur to him that, after all, Bessie's youth and joys had not much sea-room. She was in a quiet enough bay, it is true, but if it was sheltered from wind it was also sheltered from sun. It was well enough for an hour or two now and then of an evening, but to

be shut in always with these two old women was different.

As he stood behind her, he said, "Bessie, you could easily make your way in public, but I wouldn't like to see you do it."

"Wouldn't you? Very well; you will not. I have given up the idea, and I'm not going to worry any more about it. I am very sorry though, but aunt knows best. I begin to creep privately on Monday. The Misses Fraser then enter on their musical education under my superintendence."

"Fraser! the provision-man at the end of the street?"

"His daughters. Their mother wishes them to get some quarters at the music, to finish their education. When I saw her the other day she spoke of her watch as if it were a little girl. She said, Did I know what o'clock it was, for she had run out before she noticed her, and she had sent her to the watch-maker's, and she had not come back. She patronises aunt. Aunt," Bessie said, raising her voice, "I was telling Mr. Richardson how well you and Mrs. Fraser suit each other."

“Mrs. Fraser is a very excellent woman in her way, Bessie, and means well. One does not expect the same delicacy of feeling in all ranks of life; not that delicacy of feeling depends on rank either; still training and circumstances do much to disguise the want of it. But we are not called upon to make an intimate friend of Mrs. Fraser.”

“Of course not,” said Miss Dobbie; “but it appears to me she is very anxious to push herself into good society. You know I have been once or twice in the shop ordering things, and she makes a point of bowing to me when I see her.”

“You don’t say so?” cried Bessie. “What shall we do? When the fat young ladies come, I must be the stern mistress; our intercourse must be strictly official.”

“Such people don’t understand hints, Bessie, said grandmamma; “it is very mortifying to be compelled to have anything to do with them.”

Yes; Graham began to think that Bessie Barclay was not very happily situated. He thought of her, and he pitied her; but mark, he did not fall in love with her, that (owing to circumstances related)

was impossible ; but he crept into it, or rather it crept into him—far in—and ensconced itself cosily, like a cat that has slipped into your room, and coiled itself among shawls, and you only know its presence when it begins to cry “mew” in the middle of the night ; or like a charge of gunpowder in a hole of the rock, quietly waiting the match which is to kindle it into instant life, and make, oh, ever such a to-do !

But Bessie was by no means a pitiable object. In estimating her position, Graham was like the gentlemen who recommend the poor to expend their penny on skimmed milk rather than tea, the one being proved by analysis to be so much more nutritious than the other—he left out an element in his calculations. Bessie loved her aunt Barbara with a very perfect love ; she loved her grandmamma ; and Miss Dobbie, too, came in for a share of her love—here was the subtle stimulus, the warmth which analysis does not reach, but which makes all the difference between happiness and unhappiness.

CHAPTER XV.

“HAVE you seen the new number of the *Ironburgh Magazine*?” said Mr. Pettigrew, addressing the question apparently to the three pairs and a half of candlesticks, his eyes being fixed on them at the moment, and his back sunning itself in front of the comfortable fire which always flourished in his landlady’s kitchen of an evening.

Mrs. Dods, of late, often sat down after the labours of the day were over, hand idle. She had never been accustomed to idleness. If she had cultivated it a little in her youth, it might have been a resource to her now in her advancing years. Mrs. Barclay could sit by the hour and enjoy herself doing nothing; however, it was thrust on her now in some degree—at night she could not see to sew, and not being of a studious habit, she did not care to read much, so that it is not astonishing if she fell upon



sleep pretty frequently. At the moment when Mr. Pettigrew propounded his question, she was sitting with her arms laid over each other across her waist—if she could be said to have a waist—and her head bent forward on her breast, till her nose seemed absorbed in the pillowy expanse, reminding you of a fowl that tucks its beak among its feathers for the night. Evidently she treated Mr. Pettigrew as one of the family. Mr. Dods was sitting beside the gas, reading and ignoring his lodger's presence entirely. That did not matter to the lodger, who was looking at him, and determined to get to the bottom of the big envelope and its contents.

“There is a poem in it by a new hand.” Here Mr. Dods, who had watched the forthcoming numbers of the *Magazine*—as the followers of Zoroaster watch the heavenly bodies—for many months, and had only slackened his vigils from the sickness of hope long deferred, could not hinder himself giving a hitch in his chair, indicating that the arrow had gone home. “By a new hand,” repeated the tormentor slowly, “which they tell me is exciting attention.” Mr. Dods

"I doubt I've wakened you, Mrs. Dods," said Mr. Pettigrew.

"Wakened, Peter? I'm no aye sleepin' when I'm winkin'."

"One of yours, Mr. Dods," repeated Mr. Pettigrew in a confidential between-you-and-me style, "Ay! you write for the *Ironburgh Magazine*: well, it is dated Ironburgh, and signed T. D.; but were yours not all returned—you mind a big letter I took in one morning?"

Mr. Dods could play the stoic no longer: he rose, grasped Pettigrew's arm excitedly, and said, "I sent them back—the title—what's the title?" His head, projected forward at the end of his long lean neck, trembled with eagerness like a snowdrop in the wind, his eye gleamed, and the colour rose in his faded cheeks.

"The title? If I remember, it is called the 'Alps Unvisited.' Did I say it was signed T. D.? If I did,

it was a mistake ; now, I think, the initials were D. V."

"D. V.," muttered the unhappy Mr. Dods, "D. V.! I would kick you out o' this house, and would think I was doing baith Him and mysel' service."

He sat down, feeling as if he had been stunned or shaken by some accident. He craned his neck forward and bent over his book, but not a word did he see ; his head swam, and his ears buzzed.

Mr. Pettigrew, of course, had no idea of his own cruelty. He was not an author, and as Mrs. Dods sometimes declared he could "spier the heart oot o' a hurlbarrow." It was a small thing to practise on the old man. Mrs. Dods was not an author either, and what could either of them know of the tenderness of the parent—why, the tenderness of the author towards his offspring might be a caution to many parents, I fancy, both before and since the time when Cæsar swam ashore holding his Commentaries in his left hand above water—what could they know then of the tenderness of the parent, the vanity of the man, the noble ambition of the poet? Nothing! Con-

sequently they pursued their talk, leaving the wounded creature beside them to recover the effects of the scalping-knife as he best might.

“And so,” said Mr. Pettigrew, “Mrs. Fraser is sending her daughters to Miss Betsy to learn to play the piano?”

“And muckle Bessie’ll mak’ o’ them. Their fingers are mair at hame baking for the shop than playing on a piano; but the mother is a senseless body, no to speak o’ the faither—the sense for scraping a pickle siller thegither is geyan often distinct frae other kinds o’ sense. You’ve been lang enough in the world to notice that, Peter?”

“I can’t say that I have, Mrs. Dods. I respect the man that has made siller. You would not hinder folk rising in the world, would you?”

“Folk’ll no rise to muckle purpose by makin’ themselves ridiculous; but they are strong, wiselike lassies. I think I see them at it aside that fairy Bessie. Weel, I mind their grandfaither, auld Johnnie Fraser the cadger, he cam round by my faither’s place every Wednesday. I can see his cart creepin’ at the burnside on a simmer afternoon, him lyin’ on’t half

sleepin'—the beast kent the road as weel as him; it was a sin to sleep in sic a place, for oh! it was bonnie; the quiet quiet hills touching the blue, and speckled wi' sheep, nae noise but the singing burn and the hum o' the wild bee, or the whir o' the muirfowl, a mile or twa atween ilka house and nae reek—think o' a place in nae reek, or dirt, or din, and nae smell but the wild thyme and the caller air. Weel, Johnnie was a pawky body; he was carr-handed, and I mind he had a mant, but brawly he kenn'd how to buy and sell; I think he would look up if he heard o' his granddaughters playing the piano."

"And be gratified; I dinna doubt be gratified," said the wounded man unexpectedly.

"Weel, Tammas Dods, I kenn'd him just about as weel as I ken you, and I'll tell ye what he would hae said, just as if I had heard him say it; he would hae said, 'A fule and his siller is soon parted.'"

"Weel, weel, gudewife, there's nae use speaking; ye just say what suits yersel'; it's no twa minutes since I heard ye say folk scrapit siller better thegither without sense o' a kind, which opinion I homo-

logated in my ain mind, and now ye're saying the clean contrary."

Mrs. Dods, of course, went on to show that she was right and consistent, and Mr. Dods resumed his usual silence.

"Miss Barclay is likely to rise in the world before long," said Mr. Pettigrew, prolonging his call on his landlady an unreasonable time, but willing to pay for his accommodation in the coin of news. "The old lady she was with at Christmas is wealthy, and more than that, she sent her a twenty-pound note in a letter not long since; not bad wages for a fortnight's work?"

"Better than preaching," cried Mrs. Dods; "but, preserve me, Peter, how do ye come to ken the like o' that? did she tell ye?"

"It is a fact, however I came to know it," said Pettigrew importantly.

"If she tell't ye, ye man be gey far ben wi' her."

"Not a bad speculation; eh, Mrs. Dods?" and Mr. P. chuckled.

"Weel, Peter, if ye want my opinion—although ye'll never say what folk will do in that way—yet I

think we'll hae a fa' o' blue snaw the day Miss Barclay marries you. I'm no a witch for a guesser either."

"I don't see, Mrs. Dods"——

"Na, ye dinna see, and it doesna signify; if ye get a sneek afore your nose, it'll no break your heart."

"I don't see, Mrs. Dods, that you have the slightest grounds for your opinion"——

"Ye'll see when the time comes."

"The time may never come; I haven't made up my mind at all yet; I'm perhaps better without her."

"Haud to that notion, Peter, and dinna throw yersel' away."

Peter retired to his own apartment to meditate on the opinion Mrs. Dods had so frankly expressed; very extraordinary it seemed to him; and concluded that it was dictated by self-interest: if he married, Mrs. Dods would lose a good lodger. This was as plain to Peter's mind as a pike-staff. Mr. Dods expressed his surprise to his wife that she kept on Pettigrew as a lodger.

"What ails ye at him, gudeman? he aye pays his

rent, and gies little fash; to be sure it's but sma' in consideration o' that, but it helps to pay my rent; and that's mair than a' the folks in this house do."

Silence again for Mr. Dods.

Next day, it chanced that Mrs. Dods went into Mrs. Barclay's house on a trifling errand; and Mrs. Barclay, being alone, had detained her for the sake of company, and relieved herself by detailing her afflictions and grievances. Mrs. Dods, tired of the theme, got up, and just as she was shaking hands said, "But I'm glad to hear of Miss Barclay's good fortune."

"Good fortune!" echoed Mrs. Barclay; "what good fortune?"

"Mr. Pettigrew tells me that the ledly she was wi' at Christmas is to leave her her siller, and sent her twenty pounds in a letter the other day."

"That's not true," said Mrs. Barclay; "I never heard of it."

"I warrant somebody tell't Peter, for, to do him justice, he never tells lees."

Mrs. Barclay turned over the intelligence in every possible form, but surely it could not be true? Barbara would never get a sum like that, especially

from Miss Boston, and not mention it; so far as she knew, there had only been one communication from Miss Boston, and she remembered asking Barbara if the word "well" was all that was in the letter, and Barbara had said "yes;" if twenty pounds had come, it must have been since, and out of her knowledge; but she would soon be at the bottom of it. Full of the subject, and prepared with an animated tirad  against Pettigrew, who must, she was convinced, have made the story to increase his importance by making people suppose he was very intimate with them, she sat in her easy chair, playing with her rings, till Barbara should make her appearance. Mrs. Barclay had, of course, imparted the absurd story to Miss Dobbie and Bessie, and they were lost in wonder how it should ever have entered Mr. Pettigrew's head to make it; for, whatever his faults and foibles might be, they had always given him credit for sticking to the truth. Miss Dobbie recalled an appropriate saying of Miss Davie's, to the effect that he who tells a lie for a purpose is a knave, and he who tells a lie for no purpose is a fool. Bessie had no hesitation in setting down Mr. Pettigrew in the latter category;



grandmamma stuck to the idea that his motive was to increase his own consequence.

At length Barbara came in with her little customary offering for the tea-table, which she had barely time to lay down, when her mother said, "Barbara, did Miss Boston ever send you a twenty-pound note?"

A sudden warmth flashed into Barbara's face, and she said, "Why do you ask?"

"Because I have been told that she did, and I wish to know if it's true."

"Who told you?"

"Ay, who told me?" said Mrs. Barclay, beginning to think Mr. Pettigrew's information correct. "*I* could not have believed that *you* would have concealed such a thing; but one never knows what is to cause one's next pang. To think that my own daughter"—she went on, gathering volume as she heard no denial of the fact—"that my own daughter would deceive me! Pleasant things don't happen so often in this house that they should be carefully hidden. Bad news you can afford to share; but good, it seems, you must keep for your own private

enjoyment; but I might have known it—I might have known it. Bessie, my dear,” in a tone as if Bessie were now the one solitary reed left her to lean on; “Bessie, my dear, give me my handkerchief—I left it on the sofa. That I should have lived to see this day!” then a sigh, meaning everything that words could not convey.

“Mrs. Barclay,” Miss Dobbie began, “very likely Miss Barclay had reasons for the course she pursued; there are occasions which”——

“Don’t tell me about occasions, Miss Dobbie; nothing could justify it. And the next thing will be that odious Pettigrew will be coming in here as master of the house”——

“Mother!” exclaimed Barbara.

“But, Barbara, I distinctly give you notice that, when that man comes here, I go to the poorhouse. There, at least”——

“Mother, mother, stop!” said Barbara. “Why do you speak of Pettigrew? How did he occur to you just now?”

A sigh heard from the depths was the answer.

“It’s not altogether so unnatural,” said Miss

Dobbie, "on the part of your mother. I've known people suppose things with less reason"——

"Pettigrew told her, Aunt Barbara, told her about the twenty pounds; at least he told Mrs. Dods, and she grandmamma."

"By what possibility could he come to know? Mother, I told no one; and if you will listen, I will state the reason that influenced me in concealing the gift from you. It was simply to save you disappointment. You have all along been impressed with the idea that Miss Boston will leave us her money; and I thought if I communicated her kindness to you, you would at once be confirmed in your previous opinion."

"Let me be thankful that I have such a prudent daughter!"

"I knew," said Miss Dobbie, innocent of detecting the flavour of irony, "that Miss Barclay had a good reason for what she did—she always has."

"I hope all her reasons may appear as good after I am in my grave," said Mrs. Barclay, in solemn tones.

Thus was Barbara's little evil deed dragged into

the light of day, by what means she never knew until the time came when her very life hung on the circumstances. She puzzled herself to think how Mr. Pettigrew knew. It was in the last degree unlikely that Miss Boston had told any one. How, then, was it known? This was the way it was known. Miss Boston gave her letter to her servant to send to the post-office. Bell was curious to know on what terms her mistress and Miss Barclay stood, and generally to see what was in the letter. A little gum was the only barrier between her and the information she craved, consequently she got it; and, being visited by her clerical cousin shortly after, he wormed the fact out of her.

Mrs. Barclay did not soon forget that she had what Mrs. Dods would have called a hair in Barbara's neck. If all derelictions from the path of duty were as soon followed by as thorough a Nemesis, perhaps we should have a better world. The deceit and the cruelty of Barbara's conduct in the matter of Miss Boston's letter never came wrong as an illustration of Mrs. Barclay's trials and afflictions; and it was all the more useful that it was a real and tangible grievance.

CHAPTER XVI.

It was a long dreary winter, with no spring, at least no spring at the time the almanac said spring should be. A constant succession of high winds drove sheets of rain before them, varied by an occasional day or two of black frost, keen and dry in the country, but heavy and hoary in Ironburgh, making the atmosphere dense and raw, and where there was an iron gate—and they occur frequently in Ironburgh—crusting it over with ice so beautifully wrought that you must stop to gaze at it. It might drive a confectioner mad ; he might make his work whiter, but how attain that perfection of design and execution ?

But it is cold—but it is bleak. If you have any weakness of lungs, or bronchia, or bones, now is the time when it will be effectually searched out. Better wind and rain than be compelled to swallow this chill raw mixture of frost and smoke. You have it. It

blows fresh during the night—slates fly about, chimney-pots topple over and crash on the pavement—a staccato accompaniment to the loud roar of the wind. Daylight shows the slanting sheets of rain again pursuing their way across town and country.

Much has been said and sung in praise of poverty; and on a long summer day, when the sun and the lark are shining and singing in the heavens, a scanty garment, a light purse, and a homeless head, may possibly, in certain moods, be envied—in a song at any rate; but in a winter day at Ironburgh, poverty is at its grimmest. But we have not to do with squalor; the Barclays got sufficient food and clothing, and had a roof over their heads. Their house, you know, was a small flat, with rooms, as Mrs. Barclay said, the size of closets. The walls were thin; and in the house, on one side, was a piano, of the possible value of thirty shillings, on which a young lady practised what was called music with exemplary diligence, and the Barclays had the full benefit of her exertions. The twin of this musical instrument was in the house below, and also a baby. These made themselves heard even amid the roar of the tempest. Only on

the Dods' side of the building was there perfect peace, broken merely by the poking of fires; but that was a cheerful and friendly sound. All that would have been nothing, but, as you have seen, the household was a divided one. If common calamity had made common cause, poverty would have mattered the less; but Mrs. Barclay made that impossible. Then she had nothing to do, or at least did nothing, which is a deplorable thing; while Miss Barclay was overworked, which is not nearly so deplorable. Owing to the weather, it was rarely that Mrs. Barclay or Miss Dobbie went out; on the other hand, Miss Barclay went out every day, defying wind and rain. When they were all indoors, they must needs keep each other company—another fire was not to be thought of.

These things, and others put together, told on the tempers of the ladies. Mrs. Barclay grew more and more unreasonable; Miss Dobbie sometimes had not such a lively sense of her mercies as she once had; Miss Barclay, of course, never gave way to temper, but she waxed very teethily virtuous. Even Bessie, who lived in a dream and book world of her own,

felt the sad influence of the hour, and wailed the limited income which her grandmamma instructed her was at the root of all their worries. Very likely, a little more money would have smoothed matters somewhat, would have oiled the machinery, and lessened the daily strain and creak. The plight of a toad embedded in a rock seems about as wretched as could be; but it would be a deeper shade of wretchedness if several were shut in, with room to stir and no more. They would not be found peacefully asleep at the end of a hundred years, it is to be supposed.

Miss Dobbie was the first to have a reviving and mollifying influence shed upon her. Winter was gone, and spring had only looked in to leave a P.P.C. card and vanish to make room for summer, when, one fine sunny morning, when she was not thinking of it at all, Miss Dobbie got a letter. It was not often that Miss Dobbie could be surprised with a letter, though, like all people whose correspondence is extremely sporadic, she was in a constant state of expectancy regarding it.

She read it, and, good simple being! she thought

it the kindest thing that could have been written. With glistening eyes she handed it to Bessie to read. The paper was very thick and 'smooth, and on it was stamped the crest of the Dobbies. It ran thus :—

“Dear Jane—What have you been about all this while? We were so sorry not to have you with us at Christmas. Frank wished me to invite you; but I felt quite sure, if you came, it would only be to oblige us, knowing your retired habits, and consequently I could not think of encroaching so much on your good nature. But now that we have fine weather and a quiet house, we hope that no trifling excuse will prevent you coming to us. Frank and I are going to London for a time, and we shall take our eldest girls, but Miss Christie and the little ones will be at home—you are such a favourite with children; and if you like to ask Mrs. or Miss, is it?—I forget the name—that lady that you live with—to come with you—you might enjoy your visit more. I have just seized a moment in the midst of packing to write to you. I could not go without hearing of you. You had better write to Miss Christie, in case

we should have left, and she will send a carriage for you. In haste, yours truly, E. DOBBIE."

"Isn't it so kind and considerate?" said Miss Dobbie.

"Who is Miss Christie?" asked Bessie.

"The governess."

"If she thinks it so kind," thought Bessie, "it would be a pity to put anything else into her head."

"It will be a good change of air," she said.

"It is such delicate kindness to me to ask your grandmamma—do you think she'll go?"

"Oh, I daresay she will. Grandmamma," she continued as Mrs. Barclay came into the room; "here's an invitation for you to go to Dobbie's with Miss Dobbie; do you think you'll go?"

Mrs. Barclay stopped at this intelligence; she saw the open note lying, and she said to Bessie, "How is it that you have opened Mrs. Dobbie's note to me?"

"It was to Miss Dobbie, grandmamma."

"An enclosure? I was very favourably impressed by Mrs. Dobbie, the only time I met her; and she has not forgotten me either, it seems. Well, since

she is so kind, what day is fixed ? Give me the card, Bessie ? ”

Mrs. Barclay conceived she had captivated Mrs. Dobbie ; that in her, honour had peered through the mean circumstances by which she was surrounded.

“ There’s no card for you ; only a note to Miss Dobbie.”

“ My cousin wants me to stay awhile ; and she thinks I would enjoy my visit better if you were with me,” said the innocent Miss Dobbie, naturally dwelling on herself as the chief figure.

“ Oh ! ” said Mrs. Barclay, who also naturally always considered herself the principal object, “ in that case I hardly think of going ; if you cannot enjoy yourself without me, you can stay with me here, Miss Dobbie.”

Miss Dobbie humbled herself, and coaxed and entreated, but Mrs. Barclay was inexorable. “ No, she was the widow of a gentleman, and she at least knew what was her due, if other people didn’t. Of course, if Miss Dobbie thought herself obliged by being asked, when the master and mistress of the house were from home, that was different.”

"I'm quite sure my cousins mean to be kind," said Miss Dobbie; "but even if they had meant to insult me, I don't need to feel insulted. I remember Miss Davie used to say we could not help other people's behaviour, but we could always help our own."

"It's a pity Mrs. Dobbie hadn't been at Miss Davie's school," said the old lady, cuttingly.

"So she was,—she and I were very intimate there. It was through me she met Frank;" and the poor lady went off in a fit of reminiscences; after which, she took out her desk and wrote, fixing the day and hour of her visit.

Miss Dobbie had hardly gone from Ironburgh, when a note from Miss Boston came; the first since that which Barbara, to her cost, suppressed in part. She opened this in presence of her mother, that there might be no cause for jealousy; it was not a very lengthy missive. "Dear Barbara," Miss Boston said, "send the bairn you spoke of to me; she'll be better here in summer than in Ironburgh. When you want her, you can come for her. I'll have one of the Miss Starks or Davie at the station for her.—Yours, B. B."

"You're sure that's all this time, Barbara?" said

Mrs. Barclay ; but she was well pleased so far. "Bessie," she went on, "must go of course ; we can't risk the consequences of a refusal ; but, poor thing, I pity her ; only she needn't stay very long. It would have been natural and proper had Barbara Boston applied to me about her ; but she never had ordinary breeding, and having lived so long attending to nothing and nobody but herself, she has grown worse instead of better ; if she had had all my trials, she would have learned to think more about others and less about herself."

"But, mother, I think Bessie will be the better for a summer in the country ; it's what I've often wished for her, if only Miss Dobbie had been at home."

"What difference does that make ?"

"You'll feel dull wanting them both, I doubt ?"

"Me dull ! When am I anything else ? Only I say nothing, and there are people who never see below the surface. However, Bessie must go ; I would be the last to stand in the way of her prospects."

"It's her health I think of ; but there's another

thing. Mrs. Leadbetter wishes me to go to the sea-side with my pupils this season ; only you couldn't live alone, could you ?”

“That I am living at all, Barbara, is a miracle. It would be rash to say what I couldn't do ; but don't mind me. Leave me, certainly, if it suits you.”

Bessie read her invitation, and looking up said, “Grandmamma, what would Miss Davie say ?” Mrs. Barclay smiled. “She would say,” Bessie went on, “‘Bessie Barclay, by all means go.’ Miss Boston hasn't a polite letter-writer, I think. Miss Fraser was writing to her betrothed to-day ; and she brought her letter to me to see if I thought it would do. It turned out to be copied from a polite letter-writer. I said, ‘Is the man you're writing to a goose ?’ ‘No,’ she said, ‘he's uncommon sensible.’ Then I said, ‘That won't do. What do you want to say to him ?’ She told me, and I ran it into easy sentences. I made a very nice love-letter. It's far pleasanter work than teaching music, and she was more interested in it too. She's to copy it. If I go away, what will she do ? And I'll have to drop my teaching, too. If Miss Boston only knew how much I'm engaged !”

“ You’ll go off immediately at any rate,” said her aunt ; “ and we’ll see afterwards how we can arrange. Perhaps Miss Dobbie won’t stay long away.”

“ Make your arrangements, and don’t take me into account at all,” said Mrs. Barclay.

A week after Bessie went away, Miss Dobbie drove up to the door in the Dobbiestanes dog-cart, and renewed the invitation to Mrs. Barclay to accompany her to her cousin’s house ; and, seeing every prospect of being left alone, that lady yielded, and found no reason to regret the step.

Then Miss Barclay locked up her house, gave her keys in charge to Mrs. Dods, and departed with her young friends to enjoy the sea-breezes. The flat in Berwick Street knew its inmates no more for some months : the babies screamed, and the pianos squeaked ; but the æsthetic ear of a stray mouse was all they ran the risk of wounding. The family were missed. Mr. and Mrs. Dods, coming out of their own door, and seeing the dirty brasses and deserted look of the opposite one, felt a blank. Mr. Pettigrew interested himself calculating how cheaply each individual was securing country quarters, and over and over

again expressed his surprise that Miss Barclay had not tried to let her house for the time, as he had suggested to her. And Graham Richardson, he was terribly at a loss where to bestow his evenings. He took long walks, it is true, and put a book in his pocket; and you will walk far in, or rather out of, Ironburgh before you come to a place fitted for a book; but when he did open his book, he wanted sympathy in reading. He missed Bessie's odd remarks: he thought of her as a clever child; nothing more, you may be sure; for though Sara's image was fading away like the mirage of the desert she had crossed *en route* to India, he could not forget, he said; and yet Bessie's slight fairy-like figure, and pale precocious face, with its large dark eyes, the fun in which belied the solemnity that ought to have belonged to them, would perk in before his mental vision. But she had gone to visit an old lady, he was told; and for the other members of the family, he never mastered the details of their expeditions, although he had ample opportunity for doing so, if he had laid his mind to it.

CHAPTER XVII.

BLINDPITS looked a very different place in the month of May from what it did in the month of December. Heaven repaired Miss Boston's rural seat at the same time it was touching up the cuckoo's. It was embowered in trees and shrubbery, and the leaves were all in the beauty of youth; no tussle with an angry wind, nor visit from a spiteful dust-cloud, had yet warned them of hard times coming. Even the evergreens, which in winter, standing with their dark boughs banded in snow, looked like mourners at a funeral, had put on a dress of lighter, brighter green, and the firs hung pale verdant tassels from the ends of all their branches. David, with the assistance of a more experienced head and hand than his own, had put the garden in tolerable order, and indoors Bell had swept through the house like a simoom; for, however she might lie on her oars at other seasons,

Whitsunday was the time when she made her grand yearly offering to the goddess of cleanliness. A stranger within Miss Boston's gates would at once have seen, from Bell's energy and determination, that she regarded it as a religious rite. And Miss Boston—she was very well—going in and out of doors with an article of attire upon her head which had hung in her lobby for the last twenty years, to be ready, when she needed it, for garden use, and a stick in her hand, which half-a-century before had been the companion of her father's walks. She hardly needed it, but it had become her habit to carry it, and it served to point her meaning when she spoke to her dependants.

It was the day she expected Bessie, and she went the length of her gate pretty frequently, and looked along the road for Miss Stark and her charge. In asking Bessie to visit her, she had been moved by pure benevolence, for she did not suppose that a strange child in the house would be any comfort to her, neither did she think that she would be a comfort to the strange child. Barbara had thought of her niece's health when she accepted the invitation for her; and that was exactly what Miss Boston

thought of when she gave it; she understood the child was thin and pale, and however dull Blindpits might be indoors for a girl, outside there was health in every breeze.

Nearly as a matter of course Miss Stark failed to be at the station at the time, and Bessie had fully half-an-hour to wait after the train had snorted off on its farther journey. She stood almost dazzled under the glorious May sunshine. When the rumble of the train had died away in the distance, there seemed to be nobody and nothing about the place. One man looking out of the station-window, another who sauntered up to her and asked if she had a ticket—which she had, and delivered up—and a big awkward-looking boy, were all the figures in the scene, and even these did not break in much on the still life.

On a hedge behind the station clothes were drying that looked supernaturally white, and flowers were blooming on each side of the line, in beds cut out in turf that looked as supernaturally green. Rich wood belted the under side of the railway nearly as far as could be seen, and down at the distance of



a mile the sea lay as quiet as pussy, purring to itself no doubt, and showing great bands of bottle-green, or whitey-brown, or blue, as the currents, the light, and the bottom affected it. Little white cottages stood on the shore as if a dozen or two of albatrosses had alighted to rest—so dream-like were they; and over all was the blue cloudless sky.

“It’s good to be here,” thought Bessie, “and it won’t be difficult to be station-master here. I wonder if there are any station-mistresses? I don’t see why there shouldn’t—would aunt object? I’m sure it would be far better than teaching, and not very public.” Here her eye fell on some very fat immense books, which seemed to have a dark blue page and a white one alternately. “I wonder,” she thought, “if that’s book-keeping by double entry; it looks formidable, but aunt knows it, and it would be possible for me to learn.” Then she spied placards hung up, on which the words “mileage” and “demurrage” occurred in tall letters. “One would need to have a slight knowledge of law and technicalities, I suspect; still it would be nice to live in that cottage among grass and flowers; one could come

out with a book and look at the sea and never tire." At this point the station-master came out of the bandbox-like apartment sacred to his use, and passed her. She addressed him, "You've a nice quiet place here."

"It looks that the now," said he, "but we're often in a fine bustle."

"A great many passengers?"

"Well, yes—a gey wheen—plenty in summer; but it's the goods traffic, the minerals, and the manures—plenty to do, and ye maun aye be on the spot."

"It is a delightful spot to be on," she said.

The man looked at her, wondering who and what she might be, and said, "Ye'll no hae been here afore?"

"Never; and I was admiring your house and the beautiful flowers."

"Ay, they're weel enough to look at," he said, drily.

Now the station-master considered himself an underpaid slave, supplied with a house so damp that rheumatism lurked in every corner of it; and as for

the flowers, he did not care if he never saw one, but he was compelled to keep them in order to please the inspector and directors.

By the time he had thus frankly ventilated his discontent and brushed the romance from the situation, Miss Stark's little rusty black figure stood in the gateway casting a long afternoon shadow across the line.

"David," she cried, in shrill falsetto tones, "has the young lady not come?"

"I dinna ken, mem," said the big awkward-looking lad.

Bessie stepped forward.

"You're Miss Stark?" she said.

"Of course I am, my dear, and I can't express my sorrow at being so late; but"——

Here the page, sent to squire her to Miss Boston's towers, touched Bessie's arm. "Ye're for Blindpits?"

"Yes."

"Weel, hae ye onything to carry; the mistress sent me to see if ye had onything to carry."

Till that moment Miss Barclay's niece had for-

gotten all about the slender luggage ; however, it was there, and David found it a small matter to shoulder it.

“ As I was saying,” resumed Miss Stark, “ we can never altogether depend on our lobby-clock—not that it’s not an excellent clock, and we have a real regard for it, my sister and I ; no, we could never think of parting with it, it would be little short of a death in the house to do that, it has been in the family so long ; but we think the weather affects it, and we can’t depend on it to a minute ; then I forgot to wind up my watch last night—a thing that I am sure hasn’t happened for years, and Ann found the minute-hand had come off hers—quite a chapter of accidents—but it accounts for being late, an error we don’t often fall into,” and Miss Stark stopped to breathe.

“ Oh,” said Bessie, “ it doesn’t matter, I’ve had time to look round ; everything is new to me here.”

“ But you’ve seen Miss Boston ?”

“ No, never.”

“ Then that’s a pleasure awaiting you. She is an excellent person ; a truly excellent person, but pecu-

liar. To a stranger, I could even fancy a little repulsive in manner ; but we've known her so long, and she is such a very excellent lady. How is Miss Barclay ? We all liked her so much, and were so disappointed when she left so soon. It was quite a general disappointment. We live so quietly here, my dear, and we all felt a lady like Miss Barclay such an acquisition."

"What house is that?—not Blindpits?" asked Bessie.

"No, no, my dear, that's the first house at this end of Heatherburgh. Blindpits is a quarter of a mile on the other side of Heatherburgh—a sweet place. That gentleman on horseback, who passed just now, and bowed, is Dr. M'Vicar ; he is such a fine old gentleman, quite an ideal old gentleman my sister and I say ; we'll see his house as we pass—St. Vincent Villa. The uncle, who left him a good deal of money, was a merchant in St. Vincent, and he named his house in remembrance, which was very nice," etc. etc.

Thus Miss Stark discoursed till they arrived at Blindpits, where Miss Boston, in her ancient bonnet, and with her pilgrim's staff, was standing at her gate

waiting for them, like a being from another world. "Preserve me, Jean," she said, "I thought ye was lost a'thegither, and what hae ye made o' Davie?"

"He's just behind, and I'll explain how we are so late."

"Never mind, Jean; I can jalouse how it happened; and now that ye're safe here, there's nae ill done. Bairn," she said, turning to Bessie, "ye're white and wearied like. Miss Jean, tak her up the stair; ye ken the road; and come down as soon as ye like, and get some meat."

Miss Stark ushered Bessie to her chamber, saying, "You'll see, of course, that Miss Boston is a little peculiar, but she is quite the lady; a fine specimen, my sister and I always say, of the old Scotch lady."

"Now then, Jean," said Miss Boston, when they descended, "you'll mak the tea; I'm sure that lassie's ready for something."

"Miss Boston," said Bessie, "Miss Stark is more tired than I am, I shouldn't wonder. Do let me make the tea; I like to do it, and I don't often get it to do. Aunt does it herself, for she says I always forget what I'm about, but I'll be very attentive. May I do

it? Aunt says something about people knowing each other seven years before they snuff each other's candle, but it'll do just as well for me to make the tea, and we'll get acquainted after. I can't wait seven years."

"Bairn, if ye canna wait wi' time afore ye, I canna wait wi' time ahint me; mak the tea, and Jean and me'll rest and be thankfu'."

"It is pleasant," Miss Jane remarked, "to see a young lady so ready to make herself useful."

"Oh, I'm willing enough, to do myself justice, but somehow I've never done anything of importance yet."

"Have you no?" said Miss Boston. "I'm surprised at that, at your time o' life too."

"I should have thought Miss Barclay an admirable trainer of youth," said Miss Jane.

"So she is; but what can the best artist do with poor material? She's taken infinite trouble to make me go like clockwork, and I can't go like clockwork. I sometimes feel it so wicked that I can't."

"Aweel, there's nae clockwark here. Ye'll spend the summer running about out-bye, and get some colour in your face to keep thae twa glowerin' een in

countenance—(it was thus Miss Boston spoke of Bessie's deep translucent orbs)—but I'll no forbid ye planning important business. It'll maybe come your gate or ever ye ken."

"I wish it would ; something worth doing ; but aunt is so apt to object to anything out of the usual course."

"She's perfectly right," said Miss Stark ; "one never can tell what things will come to. I see there's a woman advertised to lecture, apparently under respectable auspices, in Ironburgh, Miss Bessie. Do you know anything of that ?"

"No, nothing."

"She's a married woman, I observe," said Miss Stark.

"Puir body ! I pity her man," said Miss Boston ; "he maun be a weak brother."

"Do you disapprove of women appearing in public ?" asked Bessie.

"I disapprove of her man letting her, at ony rate."

"But maybe he couldn't help it," said Bessie.
"There was Lapidoth, for instance. He must have felt small, I think, when Deborah and Barak went off

on the war-path, and came back triumphant; but likely he had no say in the matter."

"But she was inspired," said Miss Stark.

"Yes; but the question is, would she have been inspired if it is such a wrong thing as some people say for women to come out of their shells? The subject is not new to me; I've considered it pretty fully," she remarked gravely.

Miss Boston was amused, and thought, "Barbara'll no ken what to make o' her; she'll be as sair fluttered as my grey hen that brought out ducks and saw them tak' to the water."

CHAPTER XVIII.

WHEN the inmate of Ashburn Cottage had departed, and the long day was drawing to a close, Miss Boston intimated to her young guest that it was her habit at this season to dispense with the aid of artificial light, and Bessie at once declared her willingness to conform to the custom of the house.

“It’s gude for ye, though ye may no like it, and I doubt ye’ll be dull here; but I’ve sent word to Mary M’Vicar to come the morn, and ye can gang whiles to the villa and whiles to Grantsburn, and I only hope ye’ll no weary for want o’ company.”

“Oh, I’m not used to much company, Miss Boston, and I’ll get on famously; everything is new to me, you know.”

“Everything new!” repeated Miss Boston as she shut her bedroom door; “everything new, puir thing,

puir thing!" and she gave a sigh that told of sympathy and weariness. She had reached the time

"When all the world is old, lad,
And all the trees are brown :
And all the sport is stale, lad,
And all the wheels run down."

With the guest in her other chamber

"All the world was young,
And all the trees were green."

At the same moment that Bessie was pushing her dark luxuriant locks beneath her night-cap, Miss Boston was combing up the few white hairs that were left her, as she had done every night for more than half-a-century. Each was thinking kindly of the other, though both were sufficiently Scotch to avoid coming to a conclusion on the other's merits till they should be better acquainted.

At home all the bells of Ironburgh might have rung without awaking Bessie, but this night she was a little excited by being so much out of her usual, and she was roused every now and then by a peculiar noise as of a person stirring lightly. Sometimes it seemed in the room, and sometimes on the other side of a door

near the head of her bed. She was not easily frightened, but if it had been a long dark night her courage would hardly have stood out. Was the house haunted? Had Miss Boston some dark secret? Was there a man in an iron mask? or a Caspar Hauser concealed on the premises? Yet the house had not seemed either old or intricate enough to harbour a mystery. If she could only have courage enough to try the handle of that door; *it* must be there. There was not sufficient furniture in the room to shelter anything: only the bed she lay trembling on, an old four-post bed with chintz hangings that had been grand in their day, and the half of an old round table on which a little old glass stood, likely coeval with the bed, and which she had already discovered had the property of, when you were looking at it, suddenly turning up its wooden side, unless a brush or pincushion were stuck in to prevent it; and a small old basin-stand over which was spread a shining snowy towel into which the basin sank—it resembled a baptismal font. There was no large press, or old wardrobe, or smell of drapery anywhere, in which a ghost could possibly hide. She lay till

daybreak, and then the mystery revealed itself by an increased volume of flutter and twitter; she rose boldly, pulled up the window-blind, and behold!—a swallow's nest snugly ensconced in each corner of the window. Relieved and ashamed, she lay down again and fell asleep watching the handsome little beings as they darted to and fro.

When next she awoke she heard the clock strike five; she jumped up, bathed at the baptismal font, dressed, and going down stairs slipped quietly from the house.

Away towards the sea by the nearest road she could find. All the trees of the wood rejoiced. The fields were flushed with early verdure beaded with dew. The freshness and vigour of morning were in the air. The sea, after yesterday's rest, was all on the alert, knocking many little waves against each other, so that they hardly knew whether it was in jest or earnest. The hills on the other coast, lying in deep shadow, inclipt sea and land in their arms; a sky, bright, blue, and clear, stretched to the horizon; and a brilliant sun smiled over the country, and kept an eye on the roguish little waves that laughed in his

face and reflected the light of it. Insects and birds did not seem to know how to crowd enough of enjoyment into the hour, but sheep and cattle winked and took things easy.

It might have been creation-morn; it was creation-morn to this young girl. She had never been abroad in the country early on a summer morning before; she had never seen the sea; she had never seen—what was it that sprung almost from her feet and darted up straight as an arrow, soaring aloft in a delirium of song, till it was lost among the downy cloudlets? She needed no one to tell her it was the lark. Her impulse was to drop her body and soar after it, but as she could not manage that, she stood and gazed, and gazed, and gazed.

She was at the corner of a field where a heap of stones had been thrown when they were gathered from it, and at length she sat down on the stones, below an old hawthorn-tree white with blossom—she was steeped in delight. Carelessly she lifted a stone, and chancing to turn it up, there, beneath a gauzy transparent film attached to it, she saw hundreds, perhaps thousands, of creatures in motion, as if an

ounce or two of minute gray beads had been endowed each with life and half-a-dozen legs and the will to use them. Hither and thither they rushed and ran, but to none of them it occurred to burst their prison-wall; it was a curious sight, as wonderful as the big bright world round her.

"Poor little beasties," she thought, "I never felt the least affection for spiders before, but you are a funny little crew—do you think the last day has come? There, don't be frightened, I'll turn you down, and go to sleep again." She carefully replaced the stone.

"O to be a naturalist, a poet, a painter, anything but— I wonder if the Frasers are practising the lessons I left them; I wonder if aunt is enjoying herself as I am; grandmamma and Miss Dobbie are not out of bed yet, of course. How magnificent it is to be here! but I doubt aunt wouldn't think it right to sit on a lot of stones at the corner of a field."

Miss Barclay was enjoying herself, but not as her niece.

Bessie, with her impulsive demi-poetic nature, her buoyant spirits, her quick intellect, her ignorance of evil, and freedom from care, might well have enjoy-

ment. She had no past with unhappy memories or lost possibilities ; poverty she had seen often enough, but she had never come face to face with vice or crime. She did not know that beyond those hills her eyes loved to rest on, away among fair scenery, there stood a house, a sullen house, with grated windows, narrow passages, strong doors, and some hundreds of inhabitants who never interchanged a word ; who only felt the air of heaven on their faces when passing round a circle five yards from each other, watched by lynx-eyed warders, who each lived in a narrow cell, shut in with the dreariest hard labour, and guilt and shame. Yet they were human. Heaven had lain about them in their infancy, weird angel-like smiles had wandered across their sleeping baby-faces. The sorrows of a fallen race had not laid hold of Bessie yet ; to her it was a glorious world.

Miss Barclay was at the sea-side also, but she did not get out of bed at untimely hours, nor go into ecstasies with scenery, she never did that in her life. She said it was very pleasant, and she felt great benefit from the change ; and to her kind and careful heart it was a cause of gratitude that her house-



hold were as well off in this respect as herself. She enjoyed herself judiciously—did her duty as far as in her lay, and had a consciousness of it. Barbara was not without a share of self-complacency—who could grudge her it? As for people condemned to penal servitude, she might pity them in some degree, but not a thread in her nature sympathised with them; so far as that went, they might have been inhabitants of the planet Jupiter.

She was happy, and thoroughly at ease about Bessie; she could see her gaining health and strength, and the bloom she had always been deficient in; and she was perfectly safe with Miss Boston, who had few visitors, save the innocuous Miss Starks, and the only young gentleman of her circle, Dr. John Grant, being already matrimonially engaged, there was positively no cause for anxiety. She felt very secure and grateful.

Bessie burst into Miss Boston's parlour, whisked off her bonnet, and flung it on the sofa—alas! for her careful training—and said to Bell, "Is Miss Boston not down yet? Oh, what a glorious walk I've had, and I saw a lark—a laverock, you know—I like the



Scotch name best, and it has not been overdone a bit.'

"Overdone!" what do ye mean; "ye dinna eat them in Ironburgh, do ye?" said Bell.

"No, no; I mean no description has overdrawn it."

"They eat them in some places, they tell me,—there's a gey when here about."

"And you have swallows too; what beautiful shapely creatures they are!"

"Dirty beasts," said Bell; "I took the lang besom and knocked their nests down, but they began to build again, then I got Davie to tak' the ladder and gang up to put an end to it, but the Mistress happened to clap her een on him, and ye would hae thought she would hae ga'en by hersel', she was in sic a way about the creatures being disturbed."

"I am glad to hear it; I like the swallows."

"So you've been out already, bairn," said Miss Boston, when she appeared; "that's right, and what way did ye gang?—but ye can hardly gang wrang."

"No, I went to the sea, not all the way, for I thought I might not get back in time; and, O aunt,

it is such a lovely walk ! Did I say aunt ? I'm so accustomed to that that I forgot."

"There's nae ill done; just ca' me aunt, it's better than aye Miss Bostoning."

"Very well, aunt, and I may make breakfast and do all these sort of things while I'm here ? how rich the hawthorn is just now ! see there is a spray I got off an old tree at the corner of a field; I stood a long time under it, going towards the shore; do you know it ?"

"Ay, I mind the tree, I mind it weel, although it's lang since I saw it, but it will be as bonnie now as it was fifty years since."

Miss Boston's thoughts were wandering back half-a-century; that tree was bound up with the history of the absurd and tragic mistake of her life—it had been the trysting-place.

"Ay, just as bonnie and as fragrant—bid Bell put it in water—it minds me of when I was a bairn."

"So it does me; years ago, when I was in the country with aunt, we got some of it, it seems like yesterday—how time passes !"

"Does it ?" said Miss Boston smiling, "ye'll no

find it pass so quickly here, I doubt. How are ye, gaun to put off the forenoon?"

"I don't know; could I do anything for you? When do you take your walk?"

"Me, bairn!—I never walk; I havena been out o' my ain gate for mony a day."

"Why not?"

"I'm no sae able as I have been, and it's mair o' a toil than a pleasure."

"You should get a pony-carriage and drive out; I would if I were as rich as you."

"How do ye ken I'm rich?"

"Oh, I've heard grandmamma say so very often."

"Ay; how does she speak sae often about me?"

"I don't know; I think she would like to be rich too, and thinks of it a good deal. Aunt Barbara says"—

"What does Barbara say?"

"She says grandmamma once had plenty, so that she is to be excused feeling the want of money; but she always tells me that money doesn't make people happy, that people that work for it and have just enough are perhaps happier than those who have a

great deal. You knew aunt when she was a girl ; was she as good then as she is now ?”

“ She was aye a gude sensible bairn.”

“ Then she was never like me, and I doubt I’ll never be like her ; she teaches, you know, the whole year, and says she likes it, and I’m to be a teacher too.”

“ And you dinna like it ?”

“ I really can’t say I do, but I may some time ; aunt says if I persevere I’ll find my reward.”

“ And your grandmother—she’ll be expecting somebody to die and leave her a fortune, is she ?”

Bessie’s face grew red ; she couldn’t say yes, and she couldn’t say no, at last she said—

“ Aunt—Miss Boston, I’ve heard grandmamma say something of that kind ; but Aunt Barbara said, ‘ No, we were not to depend on other people ; if any one left us money we were to be thankful, and if they didn’t, they had a right to do as they liked with their own—aunt doesn’t care about money.’ ”

“ Nor you, I daursay ?”

“ Yes I do—I’m not going to pretend I don’t ; but I would like to make it myself—only in some

pleasant way. It's nice to spend money you've earned ; for instance, I got four guineas for teaching music just before I came here, and I bought this frock, and that bonnet, and other things, and it really was pleasant ; and besides, I can pay my own travelling expenses, which is a great comfort ; and I gave a trifle to a poor woman, which I couldn't have done, you know, had the money not been my own."

"That's true—it's nae charity to gie away other folk's siller ; and now, if ye care for reading, there's a box o' books in the corner there. Mr. Grant gets a box for me at a time, and when I'm done wi' them he sends it away and gets another ; maybe ye'll get something to yer mind."

Time hang heavy, indeed ! it flew on wings as Bessie occupied a corner of Miss Boston's sofa with books which were all new, or at least all new to her, and she was not at the critical stage yet ; in youth a vast amount of trash can be assimilated without material injury, whether taken in by the mouth or eye. The window stood wide open, and she had only to look out to fancy herself in Eden's bowers. Miss Boston wandered out and in, superintending her gar-

deners, but observing her visitor's trance of enjoyment, and her heart warmed to the young girl, so innocent, so open, and quaint. She had feared they would bore each other; "but I like the lassie," she thought, and she pondered the glimpses Bessie naturally gave of her home in Ironburgh, could put that and that together, and see that they did not roll in wealth; and she yearned towards the aunt and niece. She could at once have brought them both home to her, but what was to become of Mrs. Barclay? her she could not swallow.

In answer to the invitation to Mary M'Vicar, Mrs. Gascoigne sent reply that Miss M'Vicar had gone from home for a fortnight; but Bessie was not disappointed, she thought her cup pretty full as it was. The weather was gorgeous, and she explored all the roads round, often recurring to her first love away shorewards, and her letters to her aunt were just an overflow of happiness.

"Do you know," she said in one of them, "from anything grandma and you dropped about Miss Boston, I thought I would not get on very well with her, instead of that we are as thick as thieves (please

excuse the expression). Yesterday when I was going out she called me to her and said, 'Bessie, ye're no very gude at guessing time when ye're out; here's a watch I hae nae use for, tak' it and wear it, an' ye'll ken when to come in.' I did not know what to say, and I don't know what I said; but I mind I heard her saying 'she was glad she had thought of it, for I wad never enjoy a watch mair than the now.' And I am proud of it—it is a beauty, and has a beautiful chain, and I know the hour so well—it's half-past ten A.M. just now—it's astonishing how often one needs to look at a watch, I wonder how I got on without it at all. And—you would hardly believe it—but she sent for a new piano expressly for my use. She said, 'if I was to make my bread by teaching music, I was not to forget my business in her house.' So there it is, and you may suppose between reading, and walking, and music, my time is pretty well filled up. It suits me, auntie, to be a lady, and do nothing but enjoy myself, only it's a selfish kind of existence. And you see, after all, novels don't give such a false view of life as you think; getting a watch and a piano is very like the lucky things that happen to

people in novels, and yet they have really happened to me. Miss Boston certainly is peculiar. Do you know she carries her spoon always about with her? The first time I saw her produce it from the depths of her pocket at dinner-time, I could not help an uncontrollable fit of laughter. No, not if I had known I would lose her good graces for ever. She eyed me across the table in a queer kind of way, and then said, 'Bairn, I havena heard a laugh like that for mony a day, it does a body's heart gude.' 'I was afraid you would be angry,' I said, 'but I could not help it—it struck me as being so funny.' I don't think she's easily offended."

CHAPTER XIX.

BESSIE took her walk shoreward nearly every morning ; custom could not stale its infinite variety. She was not always equally light-hearted. An undefined sadness would creep over her, which even an inspection of her watch could not altogether dispel ; the childish feet were in the brook that divides the ideal from the real. She was dabbling in this brook, and sauntering on the road by the sea, when the gallop of a horse behind made her thoughts fly like a covey of partridges off a stubble-field at the crack of a gun ; and the horseman, as he passed, drew up so suddenly that it might have been expected he would have flown over the animal's ears.

"Bessie Barclay !" he exclaimed, "who would have thought to see you here ?"

"Is it more surprising than to see you here, Mr. Richardson ?"

"Yes. I never thought of you being here, and I'm often here. I'm living with a gentleman, my uncle—at least I call him uncle."

"And I never thought to see you here; and I'm living with a lady, my aunt, or at least I call her aunt."

"Who in the world is she?" said Graham, laughing.

"Miss Boston."

"What? the queer old woman that lives at Blindpits, and has such a temper?"

"Hush, hush, hush!" said Bessie, solemnly; "if I had as much money as grandmamma says Miss Boston has, I would be queer, and set up a temper to-morrow; it's a great luxury. I would like if I could afford to have a temper."

"And how do you get on?"

"Famously."

"Have you any visitors?"

"None yet, except the Miss Starks, who don't keep a temper between them even."

"Don't you find it prodigiously dull?"

"No, not at all."

when she was in a shop one day, a girl came in, and asked for a quarter-a-pound of beef cut with a *hammy knife*.)

"You're mistaken; it has flavour enough to my taste."

"Perhaps too much flavour of the kind. Is she very cross?"

"Not to me. I've seen no crossness. She has been very kind—very,—and has just been like a character in a novel,—I was telling aunt. *She* says novels lead young people to indulge false expectations, but I never expected this—look;" and Bessie took out her watch, and showed it to Mr. Richardson. He had got off his horse, and was walking by her side.

"That's a pretty thing, Bessie, a very pretty thing," and he looked down into the innocent pleased face.

"And so useful," she said.

"I'm glad you're so pleased with it."

"You think I'm childish. I hardly slept the night after I got it for thinking of it, I was so happy; but I need not have told you I was such a child."

"I'm glad there is so much of the child about you. I was afraid you were growing into a little old woman. Berwick Street is too much of a hothouse for you; and the atmosphere up there," pointing to Blindpits, "is too heavy also, I am sure."

"That sounds very wise; however, it's exactly nonsense. But I've told you who my aunt is. Who is your uncle?"

"Mr. Grant. This is his horse I'm riding. Isn't it a fine animal?"

"I daresay; but I'm no judge of the points of a horse."

"But uncle is, I can tell you. Do you see what a small beautiful head she has?" and he turned and stopped to stroke the animal's nose.

"Would it let me touch it?"

"Let you! yes; it's as quiet as a lamb."

"I'm not frightened, you know; but we're not much accustomed to horses in Berwick Street."

"I should say not. It's the finest thing in the

world a gallop through the country on a morning like this. Stand, Meg, stand. There, now, stroke her neck as much as you like."

She reached up her hand, and smoothed Meg's shining neck. "Isn't it a pity," she said, looking round, "that every one can't live in the country?"

"Not at all; lots of people don't care two pins for the country, they would think it a punishment to live in it. You don't care for the country, do you? People who wish to shine in public must prefer the city."

"I never wished to shine in public, I only wanted to do so. Speak with precision, Mr. Richardson."

"Ah! there's a difference between wish and want is there? I must try to mind that. But how about your 'youth and joys?'"

"Mr. Richardson, if you have nothing better than that to perpetrate, you'll never shine in private. Meg, don't you think so?" and she looked into the great liquid tranquil eyes.

"Meg doesn't think—that's the beauty of her life; thought never gave Meg a headache yet."

"That's hardly a blessing."

"Sometimes it would be a great blessing ; recently I would have given much for Meg's vacant head."

"You don't say so ? Your youth and joys must have been suffering an eclipse."

"It was no joking matter."

"Was it not ? Then I'm sorry I joked."

Now if, at this moment, Bessie had probed the Andersonian wound a little—which from delicacy she refrained from doing, and did not even guess the nature of Graham's calamity—or if he had exposed it farther, they would immediately have been on a different footing. The one would have thrown her whole heart into the business of consolation, and the other would at once have recognised the change of dynasty in his heart, and the course of events would have been changed. But possibly it was as well. Who can say ? We can only see what does happen, but sometimes it is tempting to speculate on what might have happened.

"Is Mr. Grant a nice man ?" asked Bessie, to change the subject, which Graham did not continue.

"Nice ? You mean particular about things ?"

"We shall see. He is a connection of ours. I've heard grandmamma speak of him."

"A connection of yours! I had no idea of that. Then you'll be a relation of mine?"

"Quite close, I should think. Your uncle's wife was my grandmamma's cousin, therefore I must be your"—

"Cousin at the very least."

"Very well, cousin be it. I don't think I've another cousin in the world, and I'm sorry to part with such a near and newly-discovered relation, but Miss Boston's breakfast-hour will be here presently. By-the-by how is Mr. Dods? Any word of the ode?"

"No word of the ode; and Dods and Pettigrew are as good friends as ever. It's really too bad of Mrs. Dods; she ought to have more respect for her husband than insist on keeping Pettigrew against his inclination."

"I don't know. Aunt thinks Mr. Dods unreasonable in his dislike of a lodger that pays punctually."

"May be; but I'm always vexed for Mr. Dods."

As Bessie entered the parlour at Blindpits, Miss Boston said—

"Ye're a wee late this morning, Bessie; hae ye been at natural history again?"

"I met an old friend, aunt; a Mr. Richardson, who lives near us in Ironburgh. He is staying with Mr. Grant."

"Oh, ye met him. Weel, that's very natural history."

"Yes, it was natural enough; but as I didn't know he was here, and he didn't know I was here, it was quite an unexpected pleasure."

"It wadna be the less a pleasure for that."

"No, and he is really a nice creature. We all like him."

"Mr. Grant aye speaks highly o' him."

"And he speaks highly of Mr. Grant."

"He may weel do that. Mr. Grant has been a gude freend to him."

"Miss Grant," said Graham Richardson at breakfast, "have you been at Blindpits lately?"

"No. Why do you ask?"

"Have you, John?" addressing Dr. Grant, who was engaged operating neatly on his egg-shell.

"Let me see. I think it's a fortnight since I was there. It's a chance the humour you find the old lady in, and yon big lout she keeps is never at hand to take your horse."

"There's something there," said Graham.

"What?" asked Miss Grant.

"One of my curiosities."

"Did you send it?" said John, while the thought darted through his mind, "Is he going to curry favour with the old lady?"

"No, I didn't. I met it out among the May-dew this morning. It's the queen of the fairies."

"The queen of the fairies! What do you mean?" asked Miss Grant.

"When I came upon her she was standing glowering at the sea with eyes like lighted coals. As I spoke they faded down into the softest violet. I never saw eyes that changed colour but hers."

"Hear him!" said John. "A case of fever imminent. May take some time to incubate."

"Don't count on patients till they send for you. She's a child—a mere child—and I've known her a long time."

"Oh, I see; the quaint child whose music soothed Saul in adversity. How is the excellent aunt? perhaps the fever lies at her door."

"Most likely," said Graham, laughing.

"Who is it that's staying with Miss Boston?" asked Miss Grant.

"A young lady from Ironburgh, Miss Bessie Barclay by name."

"Not the Miss Barclay that was here in winter? No, I think her name was Barbara."

"That's Bessie's aunt, and, as John says, an excellent but very different person."

"I was not well at the time, and I regretted she left before I could pay her any attention—a most deserving person I understand she is."

Graham smiled. He had an idea Miss Barclay would hardly relish such a eulogium.

"I always wondered she went away so soon; but

if she intended to send her niece, that accounts for it," said John.

"Did it need to be accounted for?" asked Graham.

"Why, you know, Miss Boston is very rich, and it was natural she should stay, and try to net some of the gold."

"It would not seem so natural, if you knew Miss Barclay's nature; and as for the fairy queen, her practical worldly wisdom is *nil*."

"Your practical knowledge of human nature is *nil* also, I think, Graham."

"So let it be. I never can fancy other people so much worse than myself."

"Jack's too suspicious," said Miss Grant. "I sometimes tell him that. Well, I'll call on your fairy, and see if I can bring her here for a while."

"Get Miss Boston to come too," said John. "Tell her I said the change would do her good; but she might not mind that from me; you'd better get old Mac to call and advise her. I really think it would benefit her."

"It's very unlikely she'll stir," said Miss Grant,

"Either for you or old Mac, as you call him, although I think you might be on more ceremony with Mary's father ; but I can propose it to her."

"Ay, try," said Graham, "and bring the fairy here. Poor little thing ! I'd like to see her planted in more genial soil, though I'll hardly see it. I'll likely have to go to Ironburgh before she comes."

"The course of true love never did run smooth," said John.

"There's no love in the case," said Graham.

"Nothing but pure benevolence ?"

"Nothing," echoed Graham.

CHAPTER XX.

THERE was a room at Blindpits called the drawing-room. It Miss Boston rarely entered ; and it stood as her mother had left it half-a-century before. Although not large, it was not quite a chair-lumbered closet. It had faded chintz hangings and spindle-legged furniture, among which the new piano stood prominent like a successful man in the middle of a group of poor relations, beaming and portly, while the consciously seedy beings got their backs to the light, and made themselves as small as possible.

New people in the neighbourhood, whose ideas had expanded with their circumstances, and sometimes at a rate that ignored circumstances, had their laugh at Miss Boston ; but she had her consolation in the reflection that she could buy some of these people up two or three times over. This source of consolation

was not a lofty one by any means, and would rather seem to put her on a level with the individuals who were amused at her narrow notions, so far behind the age. But she was not behind the age, except in practice. She watched public affairs, and she saw perfectly the altered drift of the public manners and customs towards self-indulgence, and luxury, and display, which has set in with increased wealth and prosperity, and she did not see it with a complacent eye. It was not merely the prejudice of age looking back with favour on the ways of its youth ; it was that she, in a great measure, despised externals, and certainly despised people that leaned on them. True, she had not builded houses, or planted vineyards, or gathered to her men-singers and women-singers ; but Solomon had not a more firm conviction that all is vanity than she had. Novels had come in her box, the heroes and heroines of which, with life, and love, and health, counted these as nothing, because they had not money enough to float them in what they called "society," and uphold them in it amid sensuous luxury. She considered them as only extreme types of modern life. She did not believe in the existence of such

contemptible creatures. Even comfort—the kind of cat-cosy comfort that is so popular in these days—was a poor thing in her estimation. Show her men or women who could face a hard lot ; who could take it in their hand and *thole*, and come out uncrushed with unimpaired manhood, and these were her heroes.

It was quite consistent with the inconsistency which is the warp and woof of human nature, that Miss Boston valued herself on her money ; but it was more as it gave her a whip-hand in the neighbourhood than for any material advantage. She was cynical, of course, and warped by the circumstances of her life ; but surely the thrifty self-denial of our ancestors, though possibly carried to an extreme, was a nobler thing than the easy self-indulgence of their descendants, against which, in her expenditure, Miss Boston lifted up her protest to small end, except getting a character for niggardliness ; but as niggardliness was not her foible, she could afford to chuckle over her reputation for it.

Bessie and the piano had this faded little drawing-room pretty much to themselves, except when Miss Boston came to listen to their joint performance.

Once she took her seat in front of the instrument, and played an old Scotch reel with much energy and precision, to her visitor's astonishment. When she stopped, she rose and left the room without saying a word; no persuasion ever induced her to play it again. "Na, na," she said, "I'll play nae mair, it was just the last tune to play the house out."

Bessie was dreamily touching the keys of the piano in company to her own notes—her singing had more taste and feeling in it than science, of which, indeed, it was likely as destitute as her reading was of elocution; she had got no lessons in either art—when Miss Grant called and made her way up stairs towards the sound.

Miss Grant was many years older than her brother—a placid kindly woman, good-natured—which sometimes means not over-sensitive, and commonplace. She always reminded me of one of the three wives of a popular clergyman, a short sketch of whose life by her husband I have seen. He describes her as relieving him of every trivial care, and accomplishing a great amount of good with very ordinary talents—facts which he records for the encouragement of

women in general. If Miss Grant and her clergyman had not unfortunately missed each other, she could fully have merited such a certificate; however, life is a ravelled hasp, and Miss Grant was Miss Grant, with no prospect of immortality from the pen of a bereaved husband.

She examined Bessie pretty minutely, for she was not destitute of a laudable curiosity. Bessie and her piano, in that fossil of a room, had a good chance of recommending themselves to any lover of the picturesque. She was low in stature—it was possible she might grow yet, however—of a slight fairy-like make, with dark lustrous eyes, and her face, usually pale, had got a tinge of colour from outdoor exercise, but not enough to take much from its statuesque beauty; her thick dark hair was merely brushed from her forehead, and coiled classic-fashion at the back of her head. She could not have worn it any way better suited to her, although it was neither classic nor becoming considerations that influenced her, but simply what was least trouble. She never lingered over anything she had to do with her hands, generally taking what she called “a short method with deists.”

She had seen a book advertised with that title, and it passed into her language as a phrase to be used when she wanted to denote a short cut to anything, and she was fertile in short cuts, except in reading, or walking, or music; these were all "linked sweetness long drawn out." Her dress was only a cotton print, but anything looked well on her, and she looked well in anything.

Bessie, on her part, mastered Miss Grant's outside in half-a-second. She was a tall, stoutish, round-shouldered person, with a fat elderly face, on which her grey hair straggled a little; she was richly clad in a slovenly manner, betokening either carelessness or want of skill. However much good such a lady may accomplish with the talents allotted her, you don't expect her to be the life and soul of a party, but she chatted small change with Bessie till Miss Boston appeared in her mediæval bonnet and pilgrim staff, looking very like a witch: if she had lived two hundred years sooner I would not have given much for her chance of escaping a watery ordeal.

"I didna ken ye was here, Miss Grant, till just the now; I was in the garden looking after Davie, and

he needs to be looked after. I fancy you and Bessie have introduced yourselves, seeing I was not here to do it ?”

“Oh, yes; we had no difficulty; I had heard of your visitor from Graham Richardson, and I want you and her to come to us for a while—you won’t object, Miss Boston, will you? I was to tell you from John that he thinks the change would do you good.”

“You’re very kind, Miss Grant, and John’s very kind—very—it’s no every dandy young doctor that would send as gude advice to an auld body like me free gratis; however, I never leave my ain house, but Bessie, I mak nae doubt, will be glad o’ the change.”

“I would like to go,” said Bessie, “but I would like better if you would go too. If you don’t go, I’ll remain here; my visit is to you, you know.”

“Nonsense, bairn,” said Miss Boston.

Just then a sharp knock at the outer door was heard. Mrs. Gascoigne was standing before that weather-beaten bit of timber, looking at the remnants of blistered paint that still adhered to it, and speculating on the amazing fact that there are in this world people who have plenty of money and don’t

use it, which was very aggravating, taking into account that there are other people, with a distinguished ability for using any amount, who have little or none to use.

Mrs. Gascoigne ascended to the other ladies. Bessie thought she had never seen such a "lady-like" person. She sat dumb, admiring her, her elegant figure, her dark expressive face, the sweep of her dress, and all its trifling but significant details. Mrs. Gascoigne spared neither time, nor trouble, nor thought, nor, in a judicious way, money on her attire, and she had what avails where all these will not—taste and skill in the art of dressing. Beside the witch-like lady of the house, and the humdrum countryfied Miss Grant, she looked like a superior being.

"I'm sorry, so sorry, Miss Boston," she said, "that Mary's not at home, when you have your young friend with you, but she'll be back in a day or two, I expect."

"Oh, ay, they'll hae plenty time to forgather yet."

"When is Mr. Grant to be home?" turning to Miss Grant; "we have not seen Dr. Grant for some

days, but that is not astonishing, at present, of course."

"My brother did not say when he would be home exactly, and we have had Graham Richardson with us, who has taken up John's time I suppose."

Bessie observed a certain dryness in Miss Grant's tone to Mrs. Gascoigne, and also observed that either that lady was ignorant of it, or magnanimously overlooked it.

"And I hope," said Mrs. Gascoigne to Bessie, "that you are not going to run away from us so soon as your sister did?"

"My aunt."

"Yes, I beg pardon, your aunt; I never could understand why she left in such a hurry."

"Ay, it was mysterious," said Miss Boston; "but it's a fine thing a mystery, especially in a dull place like this."

"There was nothing mysterious in it," said Bessie, "aunt had to"—

"Now, Bessie, dinna you let the cat out o' the pock—settle your ain affairs. When are ye gaun to Grantsburn?"

"I would rather not go without you."

"Gae 'way, gae 'way; ye're no a bairn tied to my apron-string."

"Just say you'll come too, Miss Boston," said Miss Grant; "what can there be to hinder you?"

"There's a woman in the kitchen, and a callant in the garden. If they were left to their ain devices, I wonder what things would come to?"

"It isn't that merely," said Mrs. Gascoigne, "but I can quite understand, Miss Boston, when people are not so young as they have been, they like their own fireside best, and a change of beds is not a pleasant prospect. I can sympathise with that kind of feeling."

"Weel, I canna," said Miss Boston; "my ain fireside is no aye sae cheery that I need grudge leaving it; and as for my bed, I'm no ta'en up about it *yet* at ony rate, I'm thankfu' to say."

Mrs. Gascoigne had a talent for setting the old lady on edge.

"Very well, Miss Boston," she said; "you know best, but I think you would run a great risk of catch-

Mrs. Gascoigne; and if I gang and tak' the cauld, it would be wark for the doctor, ye ken."

"I don't see why you should take cold," said Miss Grant; "our house is a very warm comfortable one, and John said you would be the better of the change."

"Young men are apt to be rash," said Mrs. Gascoigne.

"And auld women," said Miss Boston. "I'll risk the cauld for ance rather than Bessie here should lose her visit."

"Well, I must say you put the present generation to shame, Miss Boston. I can't but say it's a thought to me to leave home."

"But dinna be disheartened, Mrs. Gascoigne; that'll wear off, and ye'll be keen to gang. Auld folk's twice bairns, ye ken."

"Doctor," said Mrs. Gascoigne, when she was seated opposite her brother at dinner, "I was up

seeing the old woman at Blindpits to-day, and we had some sharpshooting. I really like the old lady, although she's not in love with me; and I like that stupid old Miss Grant too; she was there."

"I'm glad to hear it, Robina."

"And there's a niece of the Miss Barclay's, who was here in winter, at Blindpits just now."

"I am glad to hear that too," said the doctor.

"What makes you glad of that?"

"I would like to see that family share the spoil. I like fair play. I planned to bring these people about her, and I would like to see the business well through."

"You are very disinterested, doctor. John Grant would hardly thank you."

"Most likely not."

"I think he is a good deal annoyed."

"I haven't a doubt of it, but he'll be the better of a lesson."

"In what?"

"Oh, in living and letting live. Mary has made a prudent choice—at least her choice is prudent. Poor thing, she needn't have been in such a hurry,

prudence," said the widow, with a faint sigh, "but I think Mary has combined them. John Grant is decidedly, taking all things into account, the best match in the place."

"So be it; and my consolation is, that if he had not got her, some one else would. I wish his father had struck in for her."

"James, I am surprised to hear you. In your experience as a medical man you must have seen the misery of unequal matches; he might be her father."

"If people are well matched otherwise, age matters the less, and you'll very likely see Grant marry a girl yet, and be happy enough."

"Mr. Grant may marry, but he knows better than to marry a girl, or I'm deceived."

"That's possible enough. What like is the new importation at Blindpits?"

"She is a white-faced child, with dark big eyes; but the best of it is, she is so attached to the old

lady already that she can't go to Grantsburn without her ; and, better still, Miss Boston believes it, and rather than she should not go, she shakes her feathers and goes with her."

" Ah, that looks well."

" Well, indeed, talk of the prudence of young people ! I feel myself a mere infant beside them. It wouldn't have occurred to me in a June day to say, I couldn't leave yon old witch, and yet I like her too in a way."

" She'll be the better for the change ; I would have prescribed it if I had thought there was any chance of her taking my advice ; she is a surprising old woman after all ; I shouldn't wonder but she'll see us all out yet. Grant is a favourite of hers, and my impression is she would like to see him marry the person—the Miss Barclay who was here at Christmas ; she wouldn't be my taste, but tastes differ, and if Grant is agreeable it would be a sensible thing ; the old lady has sense."

" But she won't be Grant's taste ; she is a stout respectable woman. I've nothing to say against her, but the idea is ridiculous. When Grant marries, he'll

marry a lady in appearance, manner, and habits, and position, you'll see."

The doctor was called out, and went musing, "Can he propose to marry her?" The subject, however, dropped from his mind very shortly; it would be a good thing if it happened, and if not, there was no harm done—that was all the doctor saw in it.

All the doctor saw in it, but by no means all the doctor's sister saw in it. Mrs. Gascoigne was not in love, but if reason were she was aware she could get up a very respectable liking for Mr. Grant—quite enough to marry upon. She sometimes chafed a little in her brother's house, not but that he was very kind, but he was somewhat dull, somewhat cautious; in short, if she wanted money she generally had to ask it. There were people even among his own patients who did not hesitate to call Dr. M'Vicar an old wife; not meaning, I fancy, to be complimentary, although I have known old wives of whom the world was not worthy; but he was a kindly old wife, with a sense of justice, and even of generosity, fond, perhaps, of keeping his own guineas, but not greedy of the guineas of other people, and by a little manage-



ment the widow generally got her hand a good way down into his purse ; but she disliked the process. Also, she could look forward a little, and see the doctor's affairs pass gradually into the hands of Dr. Grant ; and, however many things he might have to recommend him, she was aware he would watch his father-in-law's funds with cordial vigilance. In short, at St. Vincent Villa she was sure of bread and butter, accompanied with control and irksome dependence ; at Grantsburn, of "honour, love, obedience, troops of friends," or some things that would look like all these, and she was ready to be content with a good imitation. She was cynical in her way, as well as Miss Boston, and hardly believed in such blessings falling into the laps of poor people.

CHAPTER XXI.

MISS BOSTON left Bell her woman-servant, and Davie her "man"-servant, in charge of her house and all its belongings.

"I don't think you need be anxious," said Bessie; "I don't see what mischief they could do, unless they set the place on fire."

"Weel, Bell may tak' it into her head to do that; after taking the besom to the swallows' nests, I wadna say what she would do, but it's a' insured; however, I hope it'll no be burned, for I couldna begin to build again wi' sic spunk as the swallows, puir things."

"I wish Mr. Grant had been at home. I hope he'll come before we leave."

"What's your anxiety to see him, bairn?"

"I'm not anxious, I'm only curious; Miss Dobbie said it would do so well if"—— and she stopped, feel-

ing that she was going to say what, perhaps, she had better not.

“Wha’s Miss Dobbie?”

“Have I never spoken to you of Miss Dobbie? That’s ungrateful; she does most of my mending; I should do it myself, but she insists on doing it, and it’s a great temptation.”

“But ye havena tell’t me wha she is?”

“Just Miss Dobbie. She lives with us. She lost all her money by the failure of some bank, I think, and her friends bought her an annuity; she is visiting at her cousin’s just now—Dobbie of Dobbie-stanes; grandmamma is with her there.”

“A boarder; that’s the way they eke out their living,” thought Miss Boston; “puir Barbara! she’s had her ain adoos, but I needna pity her; folk are as weel that hae to work for their bread as folk that came to it ready baked, if they kent it.”

“And does Miss Dobbie ken Mr. Grant, then?” she asked.

“O no; she has heard grandmamma speak of him.”

“And what was it she said would do so weel?”

the steps into the house.

Graham said, "Come, Bessie, and we'll have a stroll about the place. I wrote and got another day or two on purpose to be here when you are here."

"I'm glad of that, but I thought you would be longing to get back to Ironburgh."

"I have not been long enough here yet for that. Now, do you admire this place?"

Bessie looked round. "Should I admire it?"

"Ah, that's what I'm asking."

"I like it, and I don't like it. I've often read of the Dutch style of tree-clipping, but I never saw it before. It looks stiff."

"Yes, but I like it. That house is nearly two hundred years old, and these clipt evergreens too."

The evergreens stood here and there upon the velvet turf in front of the house; no trunk or branches to be seen, but, resting on the ground, each stood up a wide, lofty, leafy pyramid.

"Haven't they a queer effect," said Graham, "even now at noon? but in the twilight or moonlight, I could fancy they were a herd of old-world animals standing round, silently chewing the cud; and in winter, when they are covered with snow, you would think a family of icebergs was bearing down on the house."

"They are dreary, and there is plenty of fine wood here. Why not cut them down? They would never be missed."

"You are mistaken. It would change the character of the place. It would be nothing without them, and the Marquis likes to keep it up as it is. It belonged to an old family who ruined themselves, and when it and the estate came to the hammer, the Marquis bought it. Grant was their name, and yonder is the burn;" and he pointed to the other side of the lawn, where there was a considerable stream that had not been trimmed nor trained like the evergreens, but evidently had had the making of its own bed, in which it lay quiet enough at the moment.

"It looks sleepy just now," said Graham; "but if you saw it after a spate, or better, after it begins to calm down a bit, how it dashes forward, then runs

often till I've grown giddy."

"And where does it run to?"

"To the sea. Burns run to the sea as children to their mothers; but first it goes through the Marquis's park, where it joins the Heatherburgh burn; and then, the ground being flat, they glide quietly on till they go into the sea by the side of a little fishing village."

Graham and Bessie were standing on the middle of a rustic bridge that led to a pathway on the other side, and Bessie stooped and looked down into the clear water, showing all its pebbles, and singing the song it had learned in the beginning, as she said,

"Oh, burnie, you'll have to mind what you are about after you are married, and go to live in a gentleman's park."

"So it does. You would think butter wouldn't melt in its mouth," said Graham; "but follow this path if you want to see it at its wildest; and if you want to see its birthplace, make a journey to these hills;" and he pointed to a range of high lands that,

rising from the sea-shore, stretched across the country like a back-bone. "Let me tell you these hills, according to geology, are older than the Alps."

"Indeed," said Bessie, "they are little of their age."

Being conscious of the limited nature of his geological lore, Graham wondered if she were quizzing him for sticking this small piece of ware in the window, and he looked at her.

"Compared with the Alps, you know," she said, "or even the Ben family."

"They are not Bens, they are Laws."

"And all they should be, no doubt; but I'm no geologist, I'm sorry to say."

When they got round by the back of the house they came upon Miss Boston, still supported by the young doctor's arm, inspecting Miss Grant's poultry. Her poultry were like herself. With very ordinary talents, they accomplished a great amount of good—that is, without any defined lineage or breeding, or even foreign airs or graces. they were cosy, well-fed, motherly-looking barn-door fowls, who laid eggs and brought up large families when permitted to do so,

humdrum collection as if they had all come home from a show with a prize-ticket attached to them."

"Ay; ye see, doctor, your auntie and me doesna ken ony better," said Miss Boston, "and where ignorance is bliss, it is folly to be wise."

Dr. Grant, though very attentive to Miss Boston when present, was not often present; "a doctor's time," he remarked, "being so little at his own disposal." But, in his case, duty and inclination went hand in hand, and he had the satisfaction of hearing Miss Boston repeatedly commend his attention to his profession.

Graham went back to Ironburgh, and Bessie was left alone with the two ladies. Another young girl would have felt the post of maid of honour to these ladies rather slow and dull. Not so Bessie. It was what she had been accustomed to all her life. She slipt into it naturally; and whereas her grandinamma was difficult to please, and rarely said thank-you, Miss Boston and Miss Grant, to her wonder, seemed to

prize her small ministrations. They had not been accustomed to the grace of attention that is born of a kind heart and quick wits.

But Mary M'Vicar came home, and a friendship sprang up between her and Bessie as rapidly as Jonah's gourd ; and the grand fact of Mary's matrimonial engagement to John Grant being communicated, Bessie found herself in the delightful post of confidant, which she had never filled in her life before. Mary had her to St. Vincent Villa nearly every evening that she was sure Dr. Grant would be engaged elsewhere, and Mrs. Gascoigne was kind and gracious, and entertained them with large slices of her experience, which seemed to have been manifold indeed, and as it was all new to Bessie, and Mrs. Gascoigne herself was very new to her, she enjoyed it excessively, and admired, with bated breath, the portrait of the late Lieutenant Gascoigne, and nearly shed tears over the funeral, that was attended by all the principal people of the place, including some men of title.

Mary also introduced her to the Ainslies ; " new " people they were called, but if it was a sin to be new,

servant ; but people must be new sometime, and if an acorn buried in the earth is one day to be monarch of the forest, there seems to be no reason why a porter should not be the root of an old family ; next best to having an ancestor, if not better, is to be an ancestor. Be that as it may, the Ainslies enjoyed themselves, and brought up a large family, happily ignorant of the sin and shame of being new. A rich man is seldom the victim of neglect. A rich man, with a large family, was not to be overlooked by Dr. M'Vicar, and Mary was Susan Ainslie's intimate friend. And now Bessie was plunged for the first time into genteel young-lady life, and the contrast between her own habits of feeling and thought, and those of her new friends, sometimes struck her, but being young she allowed herself to be carried away out of her usual ruts with an enjoyment that did not think.

She had nearly forgotten her curiosity about Mr. Grant, when she heard his son say to Mary M'Vicar,

"My father's to be home to-morrow ; his horse is to be sent to the Inneston Station for him."

"I wonder he is so fond of riding," said Mary ;
"you would think at his time of life he would prefer driving."

"Wait till he gets himself drenched, and finds a rheumatism in his shoulders," said John.

"I hope I shall have to wait a long time," said Mary.

Next day Bessie met Mr. Grant. She had gone to a bridge with a low coping, on which she often sat. Here the burn was framed in trees like a picture ; it spread into a quiet wide pool just above the bridge ; little birds were always hopping about on the stones at its edge, using it both as a drinking-cup and a looking-glass, at least it seemed so, from the way in which they cocked their heads from side to side, and made other little motions indicative of being pleased with their personal appearance ; there were many wild flowers blooming, but especially there was a cluster of ferns growing out of the wall of the bridge, not far above the water, that for grace of form and beauty of colouring were a study ; they gave the

finishing touch to a nook of rare loveliness, but nature keeps all her out-of-the-way-holes and corners in high perfection. Bessie was sitting in the shade of the trees when Mr. Grant rode up. She smiled, and he stopped and looked at her.

"I don't know you," she said, "but I know your horse."

"You couldn't have a better introduction."

"Are you—you're not Mr. Grant?"

"Yes; why not?"

"I thought Mr. Grant was an old man."

Mr. Grant laughed. "Very well, old or young, I'm Mr. Grant, and I suppose you're Miss Barclay's little niece that's staying with my sister. Come," he said, stretching his hand to her, "spring up, and I'll give you a gallop home on Meg."

She drew herself up to her full height, which was not very great after all, and as she was standing in a hollow it was difficult to look majestic; but she said, "I'm not a child, Mr. Grant."

"Oh, indeed! I beg pardon for my extraordinary mistake."

"You needn't, I don't mind; I daresay I would

like the ride well enough, but I'm sure aunt would think it out of the question."

"That's right; always stick to what your aunt would like, she knows best."

"I always do, although there are subjects on which we differ, and on which I think I'm right."

"I would like to know what these are, but not now, Meg's impatient. Since you won't go with us, we must go without you," and Mr. Grant touched his hat very deferentially and rode on.

"And that's Mr. Grant," thought she, as she sat down again on the cope-stone of the bridge; "he's not the least like what I expected; grandmamma must surely be mistaken about him, but I'll have quite time to form an opinion of him, and see whether Miss Dobbie's project would be suitable or not;" and she resumed her study of the burn, the trees, the birds, and the ferns. "Now," she thought, as at length she rose, "when I'm at home in Berwick Street, if I shut my eyes and ears I can be here any time, I have it thoroughly by heart."

CHAPTER XXII.

BESSIE had been fired with the ambition of giving Mary M'Vicar some present when she was married, and contrary to her known tastes and habits, she was busy with an elaborate piece of needlework, only sustained under the severe and unwonted toil by her friendship for Mary. She sat stitching away in the drawing-room window that looked to the sea, watching the white-winged ships and the steamers that occasionally passed up and down with their long graceful feathers floating out into the air behind them, and the little fishing-craft, and the gulls, and the dreamy cottages, and the effect of light and shade, and all the beauty crept into her soul, and was being laid up there for use when she should want it, as the sun's beams are imprisoned in coal, which process interfered sadly with the work of the bright little instrument she held in her hand. Mr. Grant had been talking to

Miss Boston and his sister at the other side of the room ; but he came over and stood beside Bessie, and without any preamble said, " Are you fond of poetry, Miss Barclay ? "

" Yes. Oh, very fond of it. What made you ask ? "

" I thought it wouldn't be long before you asked me, and that I might just as well be first. "

" But I wouldn't. It's a missy expression which I never use. I only fell in with it from politeness when you used it. "

" I am unfortunate indeed, Miss Barclay. In the morning I mistook you for a child, and now I speak missyishly. How shall I help blundering ? "

" Oh, don't help it. I like people that blunder. I'm always blundering, and I've no sympathy with perfect people. "

" Do you know many perfect people ? "

" No ; not many. One perhaps. "

" Who is that, may I ask ? "

" Aunt Barbara. Of course I don't mean that I've no sympathy with her. I only mean that I'll never be like her. "

"I doubt not. From what I have seen of her, I would not expect to find her idling away a forenoon on the ledge of a bridge."

"No, certainly she would not; but then remember I'm not at home. When I'm at home I do things."

"What things?"

"Oh, I read for one thing. Speaking of poetry, Mr. Grant, do you know Tennyson?"

"Tennyson, Tennyson!" repeated Mr. Grant; "it strikes me I've heard the name. He is a grazier, I think. Do you know him?"

"The grazier? No, I don't, and you don't know the Lady Clara Vere de Vere?"

"I'm quite sure I don't know her. The only ladies in the peerage I know, are the Ladies Heatherdale."

"That's deplorable," thought Bessie. "I may drop that for a bad job." Then, in a brisk tone, "Are farms letting well just now, Mr. Grant?"

"Middling only," said Mr. Grant, very gravely; "I'm sorry to say only middling."

"And what's your opinion of the law of hypothec,

Mr. Grant?" she asked, thinking "That's more in his way than Tennyson."

"I should like to hear yours first, Miss Barclay."

"I think it unjust—most unjust."

"Yet something can be said for it, too."

"Oh, I daresay there are few things so bad that something can't be said for them. I have talked it over with Mr. Dods, a friend of mine; he suffered from it. He had bought wheat from a farmer who turned out to have been insolvent when he sold it. Of course the landlord claimed it, and there was a lawsuit. I forget the particulars; but Mr. Dods is an intelligent man. I can trust him about a good many things."

"Is he acquainted with Mr. Tennyson?"

Bessie raised her big eyes to Mr. Grant's face, but saw nothing there to prevent her answering the question in good faith. "No, he isn't; at least not well. Tennyson is a poet, you know; indeed, the poet of the day; but Mr. Dods is rather behind the age in his poetical taste. A pity for himself; otherwise," she thought, "he might write to please the editor of the *Ironburgh Magazine*."

"It is a sad thing to be behind the age, Miss Barclay."

"Oh, not sad altogether; and such people are useful. They keep things from going too fast, like a drag on a carriage going down hill, as Tories are in politics, you know."

"And is Mr. Dods a Tory?"

"Not at all. He is not behind in his political views. He is rather an advanced Liberal."

"A grain-merchant in Ironburgh?"

"No, he's not in business. He is Mrs. Dods' husband—the person that your friend, Mr. Richardson, lodges with."

"I comprehend."

"Mr. Grant," she said gravely, "I've understood you knew my father. Aunt and grandmamma sometimes speak of his boyhood. Could you tell me anything of him—of his last years? I mind nothing of either him or my mother. Did you know my mother?" and she fixed her deep dark eyes anxiously on Mr. Grant's face.

"I never knew your mother, and I had not seen your father for years before he died. I only

had letters from him occasionally,—business letters merely.”

Begging letters would have been the more correct rendering, but Mr. Grant could not say that in the presence of the lustrous eyes watching for his answer. She said no more, but stitched away with increased energy. “Poor thing, if I were to tell her he was a good-for-nothing fellow, how would she look?” thought Mr. Grant; and he went away to go round the garden with Miss Boston.

“You’ve got a companion at last, Miss Boston,” he said.

“Ay,” said Miss Boston; “and she’s no just on the ordinary pattern.”

“I should say not. How do you find she fills the situation?”

“She fills it ower weel. What’s to come o’ me when she gangs away?”

“Don’t let her go away. That’s simple enough.”

“Is’t? How lang do ye think I’ll get her keepit?”

“Oh, arrange it with her aunt. I think she would hardly object.

“It’s no her I’m feared for.

"Her grandmother? She might be made to see that it's for her good, I daresay."

"The like o' her is whiles coveted by folk that's neither their grandmother nor aunt."

"Why, she's a mere child."

"O' seventeen, wi' ways o' her ain that might lure the laverock frae the lift."

"I'm glad you like her so well. She amused me."

"She's a bonnie lassie, and as gude as she's bonnie, wi' plenty o' spunk and smeddum; and she thinks, and thinks for hersel'. I'm sure Barbara's often puzzled wi' her, for she keeps to the landmarks and the mile-stanes. I hope she'll fa' into gude hands, puir thing."

"I hope so," said Mr. Grant; and he wondered how old women needed to be before they lost interest in matrimonial projects. To him Miss Boston's fear of losing Bessie seemed nonsense, at least for years to come.

Next evening—for Mr. Grant was little in his own house during the day, that is, he was in his own house, for his office was a room in it, but he was not much beside his family—he again divided himself between Miss Boston and her companion. It was a

pleasant thing for a man not accustomed to have any bright young feminine inmate to put off a little leisure with such a creature as Bessie Barclay.

"I'm afraid, Miss Barclay," he said, "that I interfere with your work. Needlework seems a passion with you, and a young lady can hardly do anything more useful."

Bessie blushed. "Mr. Grant, I'm not going to take credit I don't deserve. I never sew when I can help it; but aunt's like you, she thinks it very virtuous to sew."

"May I say, Miss Barclay, that I hope that's not one of the subjects on which your aunt and you differ?"

"Yes; just one of them. But though I think I'm right, I try to do as she wants me, so much so that I often have a guilty feeling when I'm reading. But if it's virtuous for me to sew just now when we're speaking, why shouldn't it be virtuous for you too?"

"It would be virtuous for me, but I can't do it. My early education was neglected."

"But you might learn yet."

"So I might, perhaps, but I like to be idle."

"That's wickeder than I am; for though I don't care for sewing, I don't like to be idle."

"Have you seen the books yet?"

"Books?" she said with sudden interest; "I thought you had no books here—I mean none to speak of—and I was thinking I would get this thing done while I was out of temptation's way."

"You must think us tremendously behind the age."

"No, I didn't. Aunt doesn't read a book in three months, and she"——

"Is perfect, I know. Come away then, and I'll let you see our books. My sister has not guessed your tastes, or she would have supplied you with books."

He took her into a room which was nearly dark. All the blinds were closed, but he opened them one by one, and Bessie gazed about her.

It was not a large room and it was nearly circular. Three windows occupied one side of it, and the other was filled with bookcases fitted to the wall. The tables and chairs were dark old wood, the latter having broad low seats and richly-carved backs. They

were covered with deep red damask; the window hangings were of the same colour, and the heavy cloth on the table was littered with writing materials. An easy chair was drawn into it with its back to the window, and an open book was lying with a mark in it. Bessie looked at the mark. In bead letters was printed "To Papa, from Mary." Then she glanced at the book. It was a volume of Tennyson's poems.

"You were laughing at me last night, Mr. Grant," she said.

"Nonsense. If I had known Tennyson, don't you think I would have been too glad to say so to keep up my credit in the eyes of a young lady who looks into all things, even the law of hypothec?"

"Oh, laugh away! I might have known better, only I thought it might interest you, although I always feel provoked when people try to draw me out on what they think my subjects—not that I have subjects, or know many people,—only when I meet Mr. Pettigrew he always says, 'What book is Miss Betsy reading just now?' as if I did nothing but read. I do no such thing."

"Mr. Pettigrew will know Tennyson?"

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“Then that’s another subject on which your aunt and you differ?”

“We don’t differ on it, if she would say what she thinks, I know that. Miss Betsy is a most obnoxious name.”

“It doesn’t appear that to me, but then I’m not a man of taste.”

“Are you not? This room doesn’t say that. I’ve read of rooms like this, but I never saw one before.”

Mr. Grant smiled.

“No grate,” she said. “You burn logs here, on the hearth, as in the old baronial halls. How delightful!”

“Yes. Grates and coals are poor inventions comparatively. It’s a nice plan, too, to kindle the sticks by friction. Have you tried that, Miss Barclay?”

“Have you tried it, Mr. Grant?”

“Well, no; I’m ashamed to say I take a lucifer when I want a light.”

“I would like to see logs blazing on the hearth,

and reflected in that long mirror ; taste must have been exercised here by some one."

"Likely enough, but all the merit I can claim was buying that old furniture at the sale when the house was dismantled ; not these books though—I did not buy any books, only the bookcases—they were filled by a brother of mine who came here some years since to die ; he liked this room." Bessie remained quiet on the sofa where she had settled herself.

Mr. Grant said, " You're looking at that old black press behind the door, I see."

" Mr. Grant ! is not that a curious old cabinet ?"

" I suppose it is ; I got it as a legacy from the Marquis's mother, the late Marchioness of Heatherdale, but I would have been as well pleased with an old kitchen dresser."

" Oh, Mr. Grant ; even if it were of no value, think what associations must be clustered round it."

" Associations could be clustered round a kitchen table, too, and of as pleasant a kind. No saying what guilty secrets have been kept in that thing."

" That's the very interest attaching to it, and then it's a beautiful object in the room."

"I suppose you feel your mind enlarged, and your nature elevated looking at it?"

"Is that not the very end of beauty?"

"So it is said, but I don't believe in the elevating nature of curious furniture, and china dishes, and articles of vertu, and fiddle-faddle."

"Then, where would you stop fiddle-faddle—would you stop at hardwood chairs, horn spoons for soup, and your fingers for solids, or where?"

Mr. Grant laughed. "Well, Miss Barclay, I wouldn't feel myself less a man with that amount of accommodation, but I would let people all stop where they liked. I only meant to impress you with the fact that I'm not a person of taste. There's that book-mark Mary wasted her time on; I suppose I should feel grateful, but the truth is, the corner of an old envelope suits me better when I need a mark, which is not often."

"And you think Mary wasted her time doing this?"

"It's very ungracious to say so, you think?"

"Rather; a little, perhaps; but I often feel as if I should do things of that kind, although I have

thought it useless work ; aunt says it forms industrious habits, but I always felt impatient of it, and I'm glad to find that you don't approve highly of it."

" We must not tell, we must keep these heretical opinions to ourselves, Miss Barclay ; but if you like to see pretty things, my sister must take you through Heatherburgh Castle ; you'll think it an enchanted region."

END OF VOLUME I.

Printed by R. CLARK, Edinburgh.

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